

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTORS OF COUNSELLING COMPETENCIES OF PROSPECTIVE COUNSELLORS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN EDO AND DELTA STATES

Edith Omorionmwen OMOGBAI (Ph.D)
edithbarry27@yahoo.com

Azuka Ngozi G. ALUTU (Ph.D)

*Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology,
University of Benin, Benin City.*

Abstract

This study investigated personality characteristics as predictors of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to find out if personality characteristics predicts counsellor competencies of prospective counsellor in public Universities in Edo and Delta States. Two research questions were raised and one hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Survey research design adopting the correlational approach was used in this study. The population of the study comprised all Masters students in public universities in Edo and Delta States in the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 sessions who had completed practicum counselling course. A sample of 89 prospective counsellors was used for the study. The researcher used the Prospective Counsellors' Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (PCPCQ) adapted from the Big Five Personality Inventory BFPI) by John and Srivastava(1999) and Counsellor Personality Scale(CPS) developed by Alutu (2013). Reliability coefficients of 0.914, 0.630 ,0.818, 0.691, 0.607, were obtained for openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism respectively for the Counsellor Personality characteristics questionnaire subscale. 0.810, 0.896, 0.796 were obtained for knowledge, skills and behavioural sub-scales respectively for Counsellor Competency Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Regression analysis were used for analysis of data and testing of hypothesis respectively.

The outcomes of the study revealed the following: The level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States is high; The Big five personality characteristics do not significantly predict Counselling Competencies. It was therefore recommended that counsellor educators should teach the prospective counsellors the techniques and ethics guarding the profession since it has been proven that the big five personalities do not predict counselling competencies.

Keywords: Personality, characteristics, predictors, competencies, prospective counsellors

Introduction

Counselling involves the relationship between the client and the counsellor. It entails a person-to-person encounter, in which the professional assists the client to resolve a conflict. The counsellor attempts to use his/her skills, expertise and practice to help clients face an area of conflict, which may have negatively affected their personal relationships. Counsellors assist individuals that are having issues with relationships, problems with career choices, family, and stress in their job or academics. Counsellors also assist individuals with psychological disorders, such as anxiety, depression and other problems that can negatively affect the emotional state of their well-being and happiness. The professional and personal qualities of counsellors are very essential in facilitating any helping relationship. It is therefore important that counsellors should possess specific attributes and skills in order to be competent in their roles.

Prospective counsellors are expected to possess some attributes which should include personality characteristics, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, among others which may predict counselling competencies of the prospective counsellors. Professional psychologists recommend that the choice of profession individuals make and how they function in these occupations, is related to their personality. This perception is based on the proposition that persons with certain personality characteristics will perform better in their chosen occupation than in others. Personality characteristics have gradually become known as potential qualities for choosing prospective counselling students. This is because personality constitutes a vital part in counselling, which has to do with 'personhood' of the counsellor (Marlett, 2008). Prospective Counsellors are expected to have virtues such as empathy, respect, positive regard, congruence, human dignity, being non-judgmental, possessing skills and positive attitude for competency in the management of counselling sessions. Personality consists of the prospective counsellors' attitudes, manners, emotional state, feelings, approaches, distinctive ways of learning, pattern of response, behaviours and general composure. The prospective counsellors' personality is said to be their conduct overtime, which other persons are disposed to react to or perceive in a certain manner, irrespective of the situations. Personality affects both the counsellors' relationship with clients, personal and the professional development of the prospective counsellors. Prospective counsellors may have relationship difficulties, if they have inadequate personality characteristics requisite for professional counselling.

The personality of the prospective counsellors is related to how competent and effective the counsellor will become. Hence, it is assumed that for the prospective counsellors to be competent, they should have unique and identifiable personality characteristics, such as accessibility, confidentiality, empathy, integrity, among others. The personality characteristics in this study are conscientiousness, openness to new experience, extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, which are called the Big Five personality dimensions or the Five Factor Model. Openness includes the ability to be imaginative, unconventional, curious, broadminded and cultured (Clarke & Robertson, 2005). "Openness to Experience" different aspects include fictional, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas and values. Prospective counsellors who have this traits are open to experience, intellectually inquisitive, sensitive to beauty, open to emotion and always have the will to try something new. The predisposition to display discipline, act dutifully and strive for success is conscientiousness. It has to do with the way in which individuals control, adjust and direct their instincts. The traits that are related to extroversion are warmth, cordiality, confidence, active, positive emotions and excitement-

seeking. The prospective counsellor who has the trait of extroversion is enthusiastic, action-oriented, enjoys interacting with people; this may have a positive influence on his competence.

Another component of the Big-five personality dimension is agreeableness. This trait reveals individual differences in over-all concern for harmony in the society. An agreeable individual believes in getting along with others. He is generally considerate, kind, generous, trusting and trustworthy, helpful and willing to compromise his interest with others; this trait could be instrumental to counsellor competency, because a counsellor is expected to be trusting, cooperative, for the optimum discharge of counselling duties (Bierman, 2003). Lastly, neuroticism is the tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety or depression, sometimes called emotional instability or emotional stability (Fayombo, 2010)

Personality may have an important part to play in the course of training to be a competent counsellor; this is because, a prospective counsellor with good personality characteristics, may be in a better position to become a better professional counsellor. A counsellor's personality is important in developing not only the outer self, but also the inner self. It makes the prospective counsellor disciplined, have self-confidence in social settings, confident when expressing his/her feelings and emotions, have the ability to adjust, understand and respond effectively, demonstrate a genuine interest in his colleagues and show a great level of self-awareness. Thus, personality are important skills a prospective counsellor should possess. This will enable him/her to get along with their colleagues, sustain cordial relationships, be a good team player and work in harmony with others.

Prospective counsellors who may become professionals in future, ought to possess a number of attributes which should include personality characteristics, to be able to support counselling process. Hence, Counsellor Education programmes should also place huge emphasis on the development of good personality characteristics, which may serve as predictors of prospective counsellors' competence. The demand for capable counsellors in numerous places, has also placed additional pressure on the counselling professional bodies. Just as it is the pointer to the fact that the ability to make proper selection of these students in future situations may be dependent upon the knowledge of the expected personality characteristics, which prospective counsellors should possess. The focus of this study is to investigate personality characteristics of prospective counsellors, as predictors of counselling competencies. One could say that the competency of practicing counsellors and the prospective counsellors, when they become professionals, may be influenced by their personality characteristics.

Statement of the Problem

Prospective counsellors are trained to carry out their duties appropriately, based on the skills, ethics governing the profession and knowledge they have acquired during their course of training. Prospective counsellors are expected to possess skills, knowledge, right attitude and qualities of a competent counsellor. It is not certain whether prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States who are likely to become professionals possess qualities that positively reflect their competencies. This is because there is a possibility that prospective counsellors maybe confronted with some difficult situations such as stress and burnout from academic workload, lack of finances, personal and family problems, lack of supervision among others which may result in their having

negative emotions and anxiety. A prospective counsellor whose inner life is in chaos or out of balance is not only in danger of being less helpful to others but also of introducing his or her unresolved problems in their relationships with others.

Prospective counsellors who do not have the personality character of a counsellor may result in dire consequences; such as incompetency, unethical conduct, lack of emotional intelligence among others, consequently, they may not be able to make the desired positive impacts on the lives of their clients and the society, when they become professional counsellors. The success of the counselling profession will depend on the knowledge and attitude of prospective counsellors who will eventually become professionals.

Research Questions

To guide the study the following research questions were raised.

- 1 What is the level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States?
- 2 Do personality characteristics (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) predict counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States?

Hypotheses

The null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Personality characteristics (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) do not significantly predict the counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to find out if personality characteristics predict counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta State. Precisely, the study is intended to find out:

- ❖ level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States.
- ❖ if personality characteristics predicts the counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public Universities in Edo and Delta State.

Design of the Study

The research design for the study is a survey research design adopting the correlational approach. This research design is selected because it is a quantitative method of research that determines the relationship between two or more groups of variables.

The population of this study comprises of Master's degree students studying Guidance and Counselling or Counselling Psychology, in public universities in Edo and Delta States for the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 academic sessions. The sessions were used because the students have done their practicum. The population comprises of 87 respondents.

The entire population numbering (89) were used as sample size for the study. Moreover, there was no

sampling, hence, the data was obtained through a census.

Population of Master's Students in Public Universities in Edo and Delta States

S/N	Name of School	Session	Number of students at Masters (M.Ed) level
1	University of Benin	2017/2018	37
		2018/2019	17
2	Delta State University, Abraka	2017/2018	19
		2018/2019	16
Total			89

The researcher used two research instruments and practicum scores to collect data for this study. The first instrument Prospective Counsellors' Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (PCPAQ) adapted from the Big Five Personality Inventory BFPI) by John and Srivastava (1999) and Counsellor Personality Scale developed by Alutu (2013). The second instrument is Counsellor Competency Scale (CCS), adapted from the core counselling competencies developed by Scotland's professional body of Counselling and Psychotherapy (COSCA, 2014). The Counsellor Competency Questionnaire (CCQ) was modified to suit the purpose of the study.

The instrument is in three sections. Section A of the questionnaire consists of personal data of the prospective Counsellors; this elicited information on prospective counsellors' sex, age and qualifications. Section B consists of the Prospective Counsellors' Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (PCPAQ), adapted from the Big Five Personality Inventory (BFPI) and Counsellor Personality Scale (CPS). Originally, the Big Five Inventory comprised 44-items on the personality facets, while the Counsellor Personality Scale (CPS) comprised of 50 items, measuring 10 personality traits. A shorter version of 30 items was developed by the researcher from the (BFPI) and (CPS). The prospective Counsellors' Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (PCPAQ) consisted of thirty (30) items personality traits meant to measure five (5) personality traits that are of great concern to the study. Items 1-6 measured Openness, items 7-12 measured Conscientiousness, items 13-18 measured Extroversion, items 19-24 measured Agreeableness and items 25-30 measured Neuroticism. The scale used the 4-point ratings format 4= Most like me (MLM), 3=Like me(LM), 2=A bit like me(ABLM) and 1=Not at all like me(NALM).Section C is the Counsellor Competency questionnaire, which is to comprehensively measure the competency of the prospective counsellors, thereby rating the competency of the prospective counsellors. The Counsellor Competence Questionnaire comprised of a 30 item questionnaire, assessing three dimensions of competence; knowledge, skills and behaviour. Items 1-10 measured knowledge, items 11-20 measured skills, while items 21-30 measured behaviour. The scale used a 4-point rating format of 1: Very true (VT), 2: Somewhat True (ST), 3: Somewhat Untrue (SU), 4: Very Untrue (VU).

The researcher went to the various schools, with the permission from the head of the department to

administer the questionnaire. The practicum scores were collected from the post graduate coordinator.

Experts in the field of Counselling psychology validated the instruments, to ascertain the content validity of the instrument. To establish the reliability of the instrument, twenty (20) copies of Counsellors' Personality Characteristics Questionnaire (CPCQ) and Counsellor Competence questionnaire to Masters Students of University of the Benin, from the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology. Completed copies of the questionnaires were retrieved from the students. To establish the reliability of the instrument Cronbach alpha statistics was used.

Reliability coefficients of 0.914, 0.630, 0.818, 0.691, 0.607, were obtained for openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism respectively of the Counsellor Personality characteristics questionnaire subscale, 0.810, 0.896, 0.796 were obtained for knowledge, skills and behavioural sub-scale of the counsellor competence questionnaire, using the Cronbach alpha statistics. This shows that the scales are reliable.

Research question 1 was answered with Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). Hypotheses 1, was tested, using Regression Analysis. The practicum scores from the school were standardized for uniformity of measurement metrics. The calculated mean from practicum scores and the mean from the counsellor competency questionnaire was merged and became the composite score for the counsellor competency.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1

1. What is the level of counselling competencies of prospective Counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States?

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of level of counselling competencies of prospective Counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States

Variable	N	Sum	\bar{X}	SD	Scale Mean	Remarks
Counselling Competencies	81	10805	133.4	10.23	125	Above Average (High)

Research Question 2

Table 2 shows the descriptive data with respect to the level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States. Total respondents (N)= 81 the sum of their responses is 10805 and they have a mean of 133.4. The mean value 133.4 is greater than the scale-mean of 125 (Mean of 30 items of four points Likert's scale (75) and mean score of 50 for Practicum Score. This implies that the level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States is above average or high.

Hypothesis testing

1. Personality Characteristics do not significantly predict counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Personality Characteristics on Counselling Competencies

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	974.739	5	194.948	1.956	.095 ^b
1 Residual	7474.619	75	99.662		
Total	8449.358	80			

$\alpha=.05$; Adjusted R square= .056 R square=.115

Table 3 shows the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Personality Characteristics on Counselling Competencies. From the Table (F=1.956, P-Value = .095). Testing at an alpha level of .05, the p-value is greater than the alpha level, so the null hypothesis which stated “that personality does not significantly predict counselling competency of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States” is retained. Consequently, personality do not significantly predict counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta states.

Table 4: beta coefficients of the components of personality characteristics

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	148.489	11.102		13.375	.000
1 Openness	.681	.520	.171	1.309	.194
1 Conscientiousness	-.531	.446	-.157	-1.191	.237
1 Extroversion	.404	.443	.116	.913	.364
1 Agreeableness	-.473	.498	-.113	-.950	.345
1 Neuroticism	-1.114	.434	-.343	-2.567	.012

a. Dependent Variable: Counselling competencies

From Table 4, openness, conscientiousness, extroversion and agreeableness of the component parts of personality characteristics were found to be not significant, except Neuroticism. "Openness" and "Extroversion, were found to be positively related to Counselling Competencies conscientiousness and neuroticism were having negative relationship with the dependent variable.

Discussion of Findings

The results obtained in this study are discussed, based on the research questions and the tested hypothesis. The result from research question one showed that the level of Counselling Competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States is high. Thus, this implies that prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States have the knowledge, skills and the right behaviour, which are the major components of competence; they have the skill and ability to understand and perform the counselling tasks in a suitable way consistent with the expectations of the training they have received from their professionals. These findings are

in line with those of Oluseyi and Oreoluwa (2014), who found out that counsellors are competent, they are skilful, have a sense of responsibility, and integrity. The study of Stefano, et .al, (2010) also support the outcome of this study; his studies found out that clients identified the interpersonal qualities and skills of the counsellor trainees, as a major contributions to their competence and effectiveness. This is also in line with Ruhani (2016) who found out that counsellor trainees are competent. The training the students acquired from their educators, may be the reason for their competence.

It can be concluded that the prospective counsellors in Edo and Delta States understand the counselling process, have the clear understanding of the counselling profession, understand the professional ethics, have learnt how to apply counselling skills optimally, they have developed confidence in relating with clients, and developed the competencies needed to handle emotional issues in counselling, among others.

Hypothesis two which states 'personality characteristics does not significantly predict Counselling Competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States' is retained. The findings from hypothesis two revealed the P-value of 0.095, this suggests that the relationship is not statistically significant at an alpha level of 0.05, the adjusted R-squared value of 0.056 indicates that personality characteristics account for only a small proportion of the variation in counselling competencies. Therefore, personality is not a reliable predictor of counselling competencies. However, it is important to note that other variables not included in this study could still influence counselling competencies. This finding is in agreement with Geurts et.al, (2021) who found out that personality trait did not significantly predict counselling competencies among the counsellors in the Netherlands. This study is also in agreement with that of DiTommaso (2022) whose results did not suggest a significant predictive role for the Big Five personality domains for the counselling skills, except that the Big Five domain of neuroticism predicted enough variation in mindfulness and unconditional positive self-regard to be practically significant. The study is also in agreement with Emmerling and Boyatzis, (2012) who found that social intelligence is a better predictor of work performance than over-all personality actions. However, the finding of this study is at variance with Adedokun and Alao (2021), their findings revealed a significant positive relationship between agreeableness, openness to experience, emotional stability, and counselling competency. This is not in agreement with Kim et.al (2021) their findings suggest that certain personality traits, such as agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability, are positively associated with counselling competencies. Other traits, such as neuroticism, may have a negative impact on counselling effectiveness. The contradictory results may be as a result of the students' environment.

This implies that the

personality of the prospective counsellors does not have anything to do with their counselling competencies, anyone with the Big five personality (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) still cannot become a competent counsellor, except he has the right training. Prospective counsellors in Edo and Delta State are competent after receiving their training and adhere to counselling skills and ethics of the profession. This means that a counsellor who is high or low in openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism can still become competent so long as he/she has got the right training.

Conclusion

In view of the outcome of this study, the researcher concluded that: prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States are competent.

The Big five personality characteristics do not significantly predict Counselling Competencies. This implies that the personality of the prospective counsellors has nothing to do with their counselling competencies; anyone with the big five personality (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) still cannot become a competent counsellor, except he has the right training. Prospective counsellors in Edo State are competent after receiving their training and adhered to counselling skills and ethics of the profession.

Recommendations

It has been established from the study that personality characteristics do not significantly predict counsellor competence; based on this finding, the researcher recommend that, professional counsellors should concentrate on the training programme of the prospective counsellors in order to inculcate in students the techniques and ethics of the profession. There is need to intensify research on the competence of prospective counsellors or counsellors trainees, as it is very important to the future of the profession.

REFERENCES

- Adedokun, M. O., & Alao, A. A. (2021). Personality traits and counseling competency among Nigerian counseling trainees: the mediating role of emotional intelligence. *Nigerian Journal of Psychological Research*, 6(1), 72-84
- Bierman, K.L.(2003). *Peer rejection: Developmental processes and intervention strategies*. and accidental involvement in occupational and non-occupational settings. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. 78(3):355-376 doi:10.1348/096317905X26183
- Clarke, S., & Robertson, I.T.(2005) A meta-analytic review of the Big Five Personality factors Cross cultural implications. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 19(1), 4–18. doi:10.1108/13527601211195592
- DiTommaso, N. M., Wheat, L. S., Barrio Minton, C. A., & Cochran, J. L. (2022). Exploring Possibilities of Predicting Positive Counsellor Qualities in Counselling Students from Personality Domains. *Journal of Counsellor Preparation and Supervision*, 15 (2).
- Ebong, D. (2009). Personality Traits and Motivation as Correlates of Job Performance of Counsellors in Akwa-Ibom State. *Journal of Vocational and Educational Technology*, 9 (4), 63-75.
- Emmerling, R. J., & Boyatzis, R. E. (2012). Emotional and social intelligence competencies: Cross cultural implications. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 19(1), 4–18. doi:10.1108/13527601211195592
- Emmerling, R. J., & Boyatzis, R. E. (2012). Emotional and social intelligence competencies: Cross cultural implications. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 19(1), 4–18. doi:10.1108/13527601211195592
- Fayombo, G. (2010). The relationship between personality traits and psychological resilience among the Caribbean adolescents. *International journal of psychological studies*, 2(2), 105-116

- Geurts, S.A, Schouten, A.P., Peeters, M.C.W & Taris, T.W (2021) Personality traits and counselling competencies among counsellors in the Netherlands. *Journal of counselling psychology*, 68(1)78-87
- Gyers I.O, (2008). Office and work place, work organizational psychology. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. 7, (3), 321 – 340.
- Kim, S., Kim, S., & Kim, J. (2021). The relationship between social intelligence and counseling competencies of counselors by age group. *Korea Journal of Counseling*, 21(4), 127-147
- Marlett, K.E. (2008). Personality characteristics of counselling students at a Midwest evangelical seminary as correlates of success, satisfaction and self-perceived effectiveness. An unpublished Doctorial Dissertation. Liberty University.
- Nnebe, O.P. (2015). Personality traits as predictors of Guidance Counsellors Job Performance in Enugu State. An Unpublished Masters Thesis in University of Port Harcourt
- Oluseyi A.E & Oreoluwa S.V (2014). Factorial composition of counsellor effectiveness scale. *World Journal of Education* 4 (4)48-60
- Onyekuru B.U & Ibegbunam J. (2015). Personality traits and socio-demographic variables as correlates of counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State. *Journal of Education and Practice* 35,23-29.
- Stefano, J. D., Mann-Feder, V., & Gazzola, N. (2010). A qualitative study of client experience of working with novice counsellors. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 10(2), 139-146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733141003770713>The Guildford Press
- Woko, T. C. (2012) Prediction of job satisfaction from personality traits and socio demographic variables of counsellors in Rivers State. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 7 (3), 153-161.