

Counselling strategies for handling learning problems in Primary Schools in Anambra State

Okafor, Esther Ogoamaka (Ph.D)

Department of Guidance and Counselling
Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University
okaforesther@gmail.com
+2347034938828

Abstract: Aims: To determine the counseling strategies for handling learning problems in Primary schools in Anambra State of Nigeria. Background: It has been observed that many counseling professionals do not know the appropriate counseling strategies for handling children with learning problems due to a limited understanding of approaches and inadequate skills to address the needs of primary school pupils. This study investigated the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State. Methods: The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study sample consisted of all teacher counselors in Anambra state. The instrument used for the study was researchers developed questionnaire. The descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the research questions with a criterion mean at 2.50 while t-test was used at 0.05 level of significance to analyze the hypotheses. Results: Findings from the study revealed that there are various learning problems in primary schools in Anambra state and counsellors can employ various strategies in handling them. Conclusion: The study revealed that Some primary school children encounter learning problems in their developmental process. Some of these issues may result in unresolved social and emotional problems. Based on the findings, recommendations were made including establishing counseling units in Primary schools.

Key words: Guidance and counseling, counselors, learning problem, strategies

Introduction

Primary school period is one of the important periods of human life because it determines the future of the pupils to a large extent. Success of a person in this period not forms a strong academic foundation but also secures their future and contributes significantly to the national development. Primary education provides children with vital life skills and help combat future unemployment and social disadvantages. However, many primary school pupils face various learning problems which hinder their intellectual, social and emotional development and adjustment. This presents a challenge for primary schools in Nigeria and Anambra in

particular because they cannot always provide the requisite support or strategies for handling learning problems.

Primary education according to National Policy on Education ^[1] is the education given in institutions for children aged 6-11 years. Oni ^[2] asserted that the importance of primary education can be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by necessity have to pass through this level. Hence, he defined primary education as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years and it constitutes the bedrock upon which the entire education system is built. Indeed, the success and failure

Volume 1, Issue 1, February 2018, p. 18-23

of the entire education system are determined by it and it is at the heart of the concept of basic education in Nigeria, also defined as universalization of access of education ^[2]. For these school children, learning problem is a major factor contributing to various negative outcomes, including academic underachievement, academic failure, psychological distress and insecurity.

The DMS-V ^[3] refers to learning problem/ disorder as interfering with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following academic skills: Oral, language, reading, written language, and mathematics. According to Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act, ^[4] a learning problem means a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, dyslexia or developmental aphasia. Children who have learning problem often demonstrate inconsistency in their performance marked by pronounced patterns of cognitive and academic strengths and weakness. ^[5] Some characteristics that are associated with learning problems according to DMS-V-TR ^[6] include: demoralization, deficits in social skills, low self-esteem and cognitive processing abnormalities such as visual perception, linguistics, attention and memory problems. Learning problems cannot be cured but their effects can impact students' performance throughout: academically, in the work place and in relationships and daily life. However, guidance and counselling intervention and support can help the children with learning problems to achieve success in life.

Ipaye in Haastrup ^[7] stated that, guidance is a general label, an umbrella term that covers all the means whereby an institution identifies and responds to the individual needs of pupils /students and thereby helping the individual to develop his or her maximum potentials. On the other hand, Anagbogu, Nwokolo, Anyamene, Anyachelu and Umezulike, ^[8] sees counseling as the ways of assisting the individuals to understanding himself and the world around him, be able to utilize his potentials to the fullest and live a normal and well-adjusted life.

The importance of guidance and counselling cannot be overemphasized because if learning problems are not handled at the primary school level, the resultant effects will be frustration, lack of motivation, withdrawn behaviour and low self-esteem. Moreover, it has been observed that many counselling professionals do not know the appropriate counseling strategies for handling children with learning problems due to a limited understanding of approaches and inadequate skills to address the needs of primary school pupils ^[9]. It is against this background that the researchers seek to:

1. Find out the different learning problems among primary school pupils.
2. Investigate the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. What are the learning problems among primary school pupils in Anambra State?
2. What are the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of teacher counsellors in urban and rural areas on the learning problems among primary school pupils.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teacher counsellors on guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to collect data from counsellors on the Guidance and Counseling strategies for handling learning problems in Primary Schools in Anambra State. The population was made up of all the 441 counsellors in primary schools in the state (Source: Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB), Awka Education Services Unit, 2015). The sample consist the entire 441 counsellors in the primary schools in Anambra State. The rationale for using the entire population is because it is small and can be managed by the researchers. In other words, there will be no sampling of the counsellors. The researchers made use of researcher made questionnaire titled "Guidance and Counseling strategies for handling learning problems in Primary Schools" (GCSHLPPS). It has two sections. Section one sought information on the personal data of the subjects while section two comprised 16 items structured on a 4-point scale of strongly agreed, agree, disagree and strongly disagree on Guidance and Counseling strategies for handling learning problems in Primary Schools.

Two experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and Early Childhood and primary education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka validated the instrument. The experts assessed the suitability of the language, adequacy and relevance of the items in

addressing the research questions bearing in mind the purpose of the study. Their corrections and comments were used to modify the questionnaire before the final copy is produced.

The reliability of the questionnaire was trial tested on 30 teacher counsellors in 8 local government areas outside the study area in Anambra state comprising 15 males and 15 females' counselor teachers. Cronbach Alpha method was adopted to estimate the internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of clusters A and B of the questionnaire were .76 and .81 respectively, with an overall coefficient of .78. The researchers administered the questionnaire by themselves with the help of two-research assistants. The data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation in answering the two research questions. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistics.

Results and discussion**Research Question 1**

What are the learning problems among primary school pupils in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean ratings on learning problems among primary schools pupils.

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	DEC
1	Need to read something over and over in order to understand it	2.89	5.79	Agree
2	Illegible handwriting	2.99	6.30	Agree
3	Difficulty organizing thoughts on paper	2.88	5.76	Agree
4	Poor retention and motivation	3.91	6.21	Strongly Agree
5	Difficulties in learning and remembering arithmetic facts and executing procedures	2.96	6.44	Agree
6	Often anxious and distracted	3.01	6.01	Strongly Agree
7	Reading slowly	2.90	5.82	Agree
8	Difficulties with spelling	2.87	6.15	Agree
9	Difficulties with comprehension and written expression	3.33	5.98	Strongly Agree
10	Weak intuitive grasp of numbers	2.98	6.30	Agree
	GRAND MEAN	3.07		

Volume 1, Issue 1, February 2018, p. 18-23

From the data presented in table one above, all the respondents agreed that the items stated above are the learning problems among primary school pupils. This is because, their mean scores are above 2.50 which is the cut off mean for accepting an item. Therefore, considering the mean grand mean which is 3.07 we can conclude the respondents strongly agreed that the items listed above are the learning problems among primary school pupils in Anambra State.

Research question 2

What are the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean ratings on the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	DEC
11	Help children to acknowledge their limitations and celebrate their triumphs	2.92	5.94	Agree
12	Promote strategic learning and problem solving	2.76	5.54	Agree
13	Help children understand their strengths and weaknesses	2.51	5.02	Agree
14	Foster self-determinations	2.79	5.58	Agree
15	Provide the children with emotional support	2.92	5.94	Agree
16	Foster the pupils' self-concept and self-esteem	3.01	6.04	Strongly Agree
GRAND MEAN		2.82		

From the data presented in table two above, all the respondents agreed that the items stated above are the strategies for handling learning problems among primary school pupils in Anmbra state.. This is because, their mean scores are above 2.50 which is the cut off mean for accepting an item. Therefore, considering the mean grand mean which is 2.82 we can conclude the respondents agreed that the items listed above are the strategies for handling learning problems among primary school pupils in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of teacher counsellors in urban and rural areas on the learning problems among primary school pupils.

Table 3: summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of urban and rural teacher counselors on the learning problems among primary school pupils

Variables	No	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t	Tab. t	Dec.
Urban area	396	3.02	6.04	439	-0.15	1.96	Not Significant
Rural area	45	3.12	4.09				

Volume 1, Issue 1, February 2018, p. 18-23

The table above shows the calculated t-value of -0.15 at 439 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significant. Since the calculated t-value of -0.15 is less than the table of 1.97, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean rating of urban and rural counsellors teachers on the learning problems among primary school pupils in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teacher counsellors on guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools

Table 4: summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female teacher counsellors on guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t	Tab. t	Dec.
Male	31	2.92	5.47	439	-0.08	1.96	Not significant
Female	410	3.22	4.61				

The table 4 above shows the calculated t-value of -0.08 at 439 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significant. Since the calculated t-value of -0.08 is less than the tabulated table of 1.96, the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female counselor teachers on guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to find out the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State. The study revealed that: need to read something over and over in order to understand it, difficulty organizing thoughts on paper, poor retention and motivation, difficulties in learning and remembering arithmetic facts and executing procedures, often anxious and distracted, reading slowly, difficulties with spelling, difficulties with comprehension and written among others are the various learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State. This findings collaborates with the studies of Laasonen, Lehtinen, Leppämäki, Pekka Tani, and Laura Hokkanen ^[10], who had earlier listed difficulties in phonological processing and reading, difficulties in spelling and arithmetic that characterize developmental dyslexia learning problems in students. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean rating of urban and rural counsellors teachers on the learning problems among primary school pupils in Anambra State.

The study also revealed that the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems are: Helping the children achieve specific goals and competences, such as learning to apply knowledge and utilize learning styles to positively influence school performance, encourage children to learn how to independently seek support from counselors and teachers, identify the pupils' strengths and assets and develop effective compensation skills for dealing with learning problem, provide class room guidance lessons that are developed with specific personal / social pupils' competencies as the goals among others. The study confirms the study of Reis and Colbert ^[9] who asserted that classroom guidance lesson, encouraging students to independently seek counseling support, identifying the students' strengths and assets among others are the counseling strategies for handling children with learning problems. Also the study revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female counselor teachers on guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools.

Conclusion

The study examined the guidance and counseling strategies for handling learning problems in primary schools in Anambra State. The study revealed that Some primary school children encounter learning problems in their developmental process. Some of these issues may result in unresolved social and emotional problems causing diminished development of talent in these students, resulting in their subsequent underachievement ^[11]. Therefore, School counselors has enormous role to play in assuring that children with learning problems are properly identified in a timely manner and addressing the social and emotional needs of these students may help counsellors prevent the underachievement of these students and promote their healthy social and emotional development.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Workshops and seminars should be organized for primary school teachers and teacher counselors to educate them on the strategies for handling learning problems among primary school pupils.
2. The Government should adequately funding and support Guidance and counseling services in the primary schools.
3. It is recommended that learning disability centre be developed by the government for children with learning problems.
4. Counselling units should be established in primary schools in line with the provisions in the National Policy on Education.

References

1. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National policy on education. Lagos: NERDC press
2. J.O. Oni, "Universality of primary education in Nigeria: Trends and issues", *International Journal of African and African American Studies*, 7 (1), PP. 104-119, 2008

3. American Psychiatric Association. (2010d). DSM-5 proposed revisions include new category of autism spectrum disorders. Retrieved August 22, 2016, from www.dsm5.org/Newsroom/Pages/PressReleases.aspx.
4. W.D Wright (2004). The individuals with disabilities education improvement Act of 2004: Overview, Explanation and comparison. Retrieved on 7th August, 2007 from <http://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/idea.2004.all.pdf>
5. Salvia, J., & Ysseldyke, J. (2001). Assessment (8th Ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,
6. American Psychiatric Association (2000). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition. Wilson Boulevard, Arlington
7. Ipaye,T.(1992). Guidance and counselling practices. Ile-Ife: UNIFE Press
8. Anagbogu, M. A., Nwokolo, C. N. Anyamene, A. N., Anyachebelu, F. E. & Umezulike R. Q. (2013). Professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria: The way forward. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*. 5(5), 97-103
9. Reis, S.M. & Colbert, R. (2004). Counseling Needs of Academically Talented Students with Learning Disabilities. *Professional School Counseling Journal*, 8(2), 156-167.
10. Laasonen, M., Lehtinen, M, Leppämäki, S, Tani, P, & Hokkanen, L (2010). Phonological Processing, Reading, Spelling, and Arithmetic in Adults With Dyslexia or ADHD. *Journal of Learning Disability*, 43, 3-14.
11. Reis, S.M., & McCoach, D. B. (2000).The underachievement of gifted students: What do we know and where do we go? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 44, 152-170.