Senior Public School Principals’ Perception of Guidance and Counselling Services In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to investigate senior public schools principals’ perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers State. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Perception of guidance and counselling services questionnaire (PGCSQ) was developed by the researchers to elicit information from public school principals regarding their perception towards guidance and counselling services. The face and content validity of this instrument was ensured by guidance and counselling experts while its reliability was established through the internal consistency methods using cronbach alpha statistics and a coefficient of 0.69 was obtained. Three research questions and three null hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level of confidence. A sample size of 72 respondents was randomly selected from a population of 247 public senior school Principals in Rivers State. The data collected were analysed using criterion mean for the research questions and t-test for the hypotheses. The study revealed that, there is no significant difference in the perception of public school principals towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State on the basis of gender. But a significant difference in perception of guidance and counselling services was found between urban and rural, pilot and non-pilot school principals. The study in line with the findings recommended amongst others that, principals in non-pilot schools for counselling should be enlightened about guidance and counselling services and be encouraged to cooperate and support counsellors in the discharge of their duties. The state government should post counsellors to all the schools within her domain for all to benefit.

Keywords: school principal

INTRODUCTION
A school principal is the Chief Executive and Chief Academic officer of a school, especially a secondary school as commonly used in Nigeria. The principal is the authority figure and most importantly the maker of decisions (Ihiegbulen, 2008). It is within the power of the principal to decide if guidance and counselling services will function in his/her school or not. The cooperation of the principal will go a long way to give guidance and counselling services the pride of place it occupy in the school system. Ihiegbulen and Ihiegbulen outlined the following functions of the school principal in the effective execution of the guidance programme as follows; (1) introduction of a newly employed school guidance counsellor to staff, parents and students (2) provide the needed facilities to the counsellor for the effective implementation of the programme (3) provision of finance to the counsellor (4) setting up of a school guidance and counselling committees (5)render minor counselling of students in partnership with the school counsellor. This cooperation is lacking in most our public schools in most cases.

The importance of guidance and counselling services in the development of our educational system cannot be overemphasised. Guidance and counselling services assist individuals to explore their environments, discover their strengths and weaknesses, potentials, talents and skills to their advantage. Guidance and counselling services helps individuals to set realistic goals in harmony with their
environment. No wonder the national policy on education (2013) laid emphasis in section 8, number 127 (vi) a-c about guidance and counselling in these excepts:

a. Government shall continue to make provision training teachers in guidance and counselling
b. Establish and equip
   • Counselling clinics
   • Career resource centres
   • Information centres
c. Proprietors of schools shall provide adequate number of guidance counsellors for their institutions.

Thus, guidance and counselling is one of the educational support services in Nigeria aimed at facilitating the implementation of educational policy, the attainment of policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of educational system. The goals of educational support services as spelt out in section 8 number 126 of the national policy on education (2013) is as follows,

a. Develop, access and improve educational programmes
b. Enhance teaching and improve the competence of teachers
c. Provide conducive environment for learning
d. Make learning experiences more meaningful and realistic for children.
e. Make education more cost-effective
f. Promote in-service education
g. Enhance access to learning
h. Develop and promote effective use of innovative materials in schools and
i. Promote partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and International Development Partners (IDPs) to access resources.

These goals are in harmony with the goals of guidance and counselling but as lofty as these goals are most principals in our secondary schools develop cold feet towards guidance and counselling services. In harmony with this view Adeoye (2004) expressing the views of Ipaye and Bojuwanye says that; other professionals in the school system do not see themselves as guidance personnel and their attitude towards counselling is poor no matter their age, status, sex or religion.

In the same vein Simon (2008) opined that counsellors have not been accorded full recognition and professional status in Nigeria to render their services. Deng in Uzoeshi (2013) posits that the school administrators (principals) including teachers are sometimes ignorant of the need for guidance and counselling services in their schools because they sometime see the school counsellor as a threat to their status as the head of the school.

The non-recognition and cold perception of school principals towards guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Rivers State gave the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) the impetus to visit the then commissioner of education prof Kaniye S.A. Ebeku on the 2nd of June, 2016 to make a case for the recognition of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Rivers State. This move became necessary because most counsellors posted to schools were converted to subject teachers. The commissioner picked thirty (30) pilot schools to experiment the gains of counselling, striping counsellors of all other assignments in those schools, subsequently a meeting of the principals of this pilot schools were called and well educated about the intentions of the commissioner. This is a welcome development the researchers are interested to ascertain if the perception of principals in these pilot schools are different from the others towards guidance and counselling services. Other moderator variables includes location of school (urban and rural school principals) gender (male and female principals). It is however interesting to know that inspite of this great move by CASSON, the impact of guidance and counselling services have not been fully felt in secondary schools in Rivers State, the guidance services are tied to the existence of a counsellor in a school and the cooperation he garners from his/her principal in the discharge of his/her duties. It is against this background that this study is conceived.

Also, a study conducted by Arowolo (2013) on counsellors perception of problems facing guidance and counselling services in Nigerian schools revealed that wrong attitude of principals is one of the problems
militating against the practice of guidance and counselling in secondary schools. This they achieve by assigning counsellors to other duties in the school apart from counselling, like subject teacher, class master etc and refusing to allocate funds to the counsellor for the purchase of counselling materials like inventories and equipping the counsellors’ office.

Previous studies by Achebe, Bulus, Ademola, Deng, and Ede in Amede (2018) revealed that principals and teachers constitute the greatest obstacle to the successful implementation of guidance and counselling services. Ademola in Amede (2018) also attributed the negative attitudinal dispositions to the ignorance of principal and teachers about the relevance of guidance and counselling services in schools. Bulus (2001) believed that principals and teachers misconceive the counsellors’ status which creates conflict between them. Deng (2001) stressed that principals who know nothing or little about counselling will not in any way appreciate the need of the counsellor to be relieved of heavy teaching loads and other curriculum duties. Achebe in Amede (2018) stated that some principals are rigid and traditional and would not welcome new ideas.

Akinade (2012) also noted that several people in the society do not know the specific roles of the counsellor and even in the school setting where awareness is expected to be high. School personnel, such as teachers and principals misconstrue the functions of the counsellor, this in most cases leads to rivalry among them. This ultimately leads to resistance of counselling by colleagues and principals. Olaosebikan in Osumah et al. (2018) posited that counsellors face resistance which might be stiff and persistent from principals and colleagues. The resistance of principals may be reflected in their lukewarm, poor or reluctant attitude in supporting the implementation of the programme.

Nyamaka, Ondima, Nyamwange, Onibaba and Magaki (2013) in a study on the assessment of implementation levels of guidance and counselling programme in Kenya secondary schools. The study revealed that there was no gender difference in the perception of participants with respect to challenges hindering the implementation of counselling programmes in schools. In the same vein Wambu and Fisher (2015) carried out a research on school guidance and counselling in Kenya, historical development, current status and future prospects. The study revealed that there was no gender difference among participants of the study in their perception of challenges hindering the implementation of counselling programmes in school.

Osumah, Omi-Ujuanbi and Azelama (2018) conducted a study on counsellors’ perception of challenges hindering effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Edo state, Nigeria. The study found that there was a significant difference between male and female counsellors in their perception of the challenges hindering the effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Edo state.

Aluede, Adomen and Afen-Akpaid (2004) opined that lack of standardised assessment materials for professional use especially in rural, public and private secondary schools prevent practicing counsellors in schools from carrying out their counselling functions effectively.

Statement of the problem

Guidance and counselling has been accorded full recognition by the federal government as expressed in the National policy on Education (2013). The federal ministry of education has also launched a national policy on guidance and Counselling and its implementation guidelines in 2018, yet the age-longed misperception of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools still lingers and counselling has not been given the pride of place it occupies in the school system by school principals who are the administrative heads in secondary schools. Most of the principals perceive counsellors who are the custodians of counselling services as competitors and threats to the authority they held. Some principals tend to play down on the counselling services rendered by the guidance counsellor by withholding support for its full implementation. Some principals assign teaching subjects to counsellors in order to frustrate the proper execution of counselling services. Others feel that sending counsellors to their school may give the impression that their school is plague with diverse problems with this view they jeopardise the effective implementation of guidance services in their various domains by denying the counsellor the facilities needed to accomplish his work. The laudable goals of guidance and counselling services have
not been achieved because of the non-acceptance of counsellors by school heads (principals). However, the researchers cannot say ordinarily why most principals perceive guidance and counselling services in such ‘Luke warm’ manner, it became therefore incumbent on the researchers to ascertain empirically why guidance and counselling services are perceived in that light. This is the foundation problem of the study.

**Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to investigate public school principals’ perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers State. Specifically the objective of the study includes,

1. To determine the perception of public school principals’ towards guidance and counselling services based on gender
2. Investigate the perception of public school principals in rural and urban schools towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the perception of public school principals in pilot and non-pilot schools towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised;

1. To what extent do male and female public school principals differ in their perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers state?
2. To what extent do public school principals in rural schools differ in their perception of guidance and counselling services from those in the urban schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the extent to which public school principals in pilot schools differ from their counterparts in non-pilot schools in their perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers state?

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study,

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female public school principals towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State
2. There is no significant difference in the perception of public school principals in rural and urban schools towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State
3. There is no significant difference in perception between public school principals in pilot and non-pilot schools towards guidance and counselling services.

**METHODS**

The study adopted the survey research design, this is most appropriate because survey research is used mainly for purpose of identification, description, explanation and prediction of states of affairs about certain phenomena and variables and their interrelations in a natural setting overtime and different age-related groups (Kpolovie, 2010). Specifically the descriptive survey is adopted for the study.

The population of the study consists of all the public senior secondary school principals in Rivers State, numbering 247 (source: senior secondary school board, office of the director planning, research and statistics). The sample of the study consists of 72 public senior secondary school principals randomly selected from 36 urban and 36 rural schools (36 males and 36 females). The simple random sampling technique was used to achieve this. Names of all the 247 senior schools were written on different slips of papers, properly wrapped, placed in a container and shaken properly. Schools were blindly picked by replacement until 72 schools were picked, this number constitutes about 10% of the total population and the principals of these school formed the sample.

The instrument ‘Principals’ Perception of Guidance and Counselling Services Questionnaire’(PPGCSQ) was used for data collection. The PPGCSQ has two sections A and B. section A elicits information concerning personal data such as name of school, location of school, gender and whether school is a pilot school on counselling or not, while section B consists of 15 self-report items revealing how Guidance and Counselling Services are perceived by school heads (principals).

The items were positively and negatively keyed on a four-point scale of 1-4. (4) strongly Agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly Disagree
The items on the questionnaire give a minimum of 15 points and a maximum of 60 points. A criterion mean of 2.5 was set to access the perception of principals. Any mean below 2.5 is rated negative perception while any mean score above 2.5 is rated positive perception thus the criterion mean of 2.5 was achieved as follows 4+3+2+1 = 10, 10/4 = 2.5

The face and content validity of PPGCSQ was determined by three experts in guidance and counselling from the three Universities in Rivers State. The experts made their input, through their comments and suggestions and their suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the questionnaire which was used for the study.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through the internal constituency method. 25 public senior secondary school principals were given the instrument to respond to and data collected was subjected to Cronbach Alpha statistics and it yielded a coefficient of 0.69 which was considered high for utilisation by experts.

The instrument was administered through the direct delivery method (DDM) otherwise known as the face to face method, instruments were retrieved on the same day, no instrument suffered dearth.

Data collected from the instruments were subjected to descriptive and parametric statistics. The research questions were answered with criterion mean set while the hypotheses were tested using t-test statistics.
## RESULTS
Table 1: Perception of public school principals towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/n</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Non-pilot</th>
<th>Criterion mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Counsellors are not different from teachers</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>School counsellors should not be exempted from teaching</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The school can function properly without counsellors</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students behaviour problems will not be better handled by counsellors</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Guidance and counselling services are very needful and should be supported</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I support the conclusion of guidance and counselling programmes in the school time table</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I do not envy the counsellors position in the organisation</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vice principals and teachers should not usurp the counselling role</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The presence of guidance and counselling services can influence the academic achievement of students</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I’m in support of dedicating a standard office for the counsellors’ use</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Professional advice from the counsellor is very useful for any administration</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I appreciate the role of counsellors in the school</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Counsellors worth in the school cannot be underestimated</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I will not hesitate to refer students, teachers, parents to the counsellor for professional advice</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I will support a separate budget for counselling activities in my school</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1: To what extent do male and female public school principals differ in their perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers State?

Gleaned data from table 1 above shows that out of 15 items, male and female public school principals agreed on all either negatively or positively except on item 4, where male principals are in the affirmative while their female counterparts do not believe that students behaviour problems will be better handled by counsellors. This difference in perception notwithstanding, the grand mean for males is 2.59 while that of the females 2.56, the answer to research question 1 is that: to a large extent male and female public school principals do not differ in their perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent do public school principals in rural schools differ in their perception of guidance and counselling services from those in the urban schools in Rivers State?

Harvested data as shown on table 1 above indicates that out of 15 items both urban and rural public school principals uniformly perceived 7 items either positively or negatively but at variance on the remaining 8 items. The grand mean of 2.65 for urban principals and 2.3 for the rural principals shows that: urban and rural public school principals differ to a large extent on their perception of guidance and counselling services.

Research Question 3: What is the extent to which public school principals in pilot schools differ from their counterparts in non-pilot schools in their perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers state?

Looking at the data on table 1, it shows that pilot and non-pilot school principals only agreed on 3 items out of the 15 items and are at variance on 9 items. The grand mean score of 3.16 for the pilot school principals and 2.28 for the non-pilot school principals shows that, pilot and non-pilot school principals differs to a large extent on their perception of guidance and counselling services.

Null hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female public school principals towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State

Table 2: t-test analysis of difference by male and female public school principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.600</td>
<td>1.994</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Accept H₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The t-test analysis of gender difference in the perception of public school principals shows that the calculated t-test value is less than the table value of t at 0.05 level of significance, thus the null hypothesis of no significant gender is accepted.

Null hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the perception of public school principals in rural and urban schools towards guidance and counselling services in Rivers State

Table 3: t-test analysis of difference by urban and rural school principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.100</td>
<td>1.994</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Reject H₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the analysis on table 3 we can see that, the calculated t-test value of 2.1 is higher than the table value of t-test which is 1.994 at 0.05 level of significance, this calls for the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. This means a significant difference exist between rural and urban principals in perception of guidance and counselling services.

Null hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in perception between public school principals in pilot and non-pilot schools towards guidance and counselling services.
Table 4: t-test analysis of difference by pilot and non-pilot school principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>x</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.400</td>
<td>1.994</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Reject H₀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-pilot</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data on table 4 clearly shows that the calculated t-test value of 2.4 is greater than the table value of t-test which is 1.994 at 0.05 level of significance. This calls for the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis this means, there is a significant difference between principal in pilot and non-pilot schools in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
The study investigated public senior secondary school principals’ perception of guidance and counselling services in Rivers state. The findings of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the perfection of male and female public school principals’ towards guidance and counselling services. This finding is inline with the findings of Nyamaka et al (2013) and Wambu et al (2015) who found no significant gender difference in perception among participants of their various studies towards guidance and counselling service. The probable reason for this result could be that both male and female public school principals are exposed to the same working environment and job specification. This study however negates the findings of Osumah et al (2018) who found a significant gender difference in their perception of the challenges hindering the effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Edo State. The probable reason for this variance in finding could be the study environment and the respondents, Osumal etal used both private and public school principals but this present study used only public school principals.

Again the study in the second hypothesis tested found that there is a significant difference in perception between urban and rural school principals towards guidance and counselling services. The probable reason could be that urban school principals may be exposed to facilities that can enhance the effective implementation of guidance and counselling services than the rural schools, which are often times neglected by government in the provision of facilities, most often the rural communities depend on their host communities for the provision of facilities. This study is however in line with the opinion of Aluede et al (2004) who said that lack of standardised assessment materials for professional use especially in rural, public and private secondary schools prevent practicing counsellors in schools from carrying out their counselling functions effectively.

Finally, hypothesis 3 tested revealed that a significant difference in perception exists between principals in pilot and non-pilot schools towards guidance and counselling services. The probable reason for this finding could be that the pilot school principals were well charged and funded to encourage the full implementation of guidance and counselling services in their various schools. This might be lacking in the non-pilot schools.

CONCLUSION
From the findings of this study it can be concluded that senior public school principals differ significantly in their perception of guidance and counselling services based on location of school (rural and urban) and in pilot and non-pilot schools in Rivers. However no gender difference in perception of guidance and counselling services was found in the study.

RECOMMENDATION
Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:
1. Principals in all the secondary schools in Rivers state should acknowledge that counselling has come to stay in our school system and embrace it fully as policy on guidance and counselling has been launched by the federal ministry of education. Besides the federal government has given counselling a full recognition in the National Policy on Education.
2. Urban and Rural schools should be treated equally by government in terms of provision of facilities that will enhance counselling services.

3. Government of Rivers State should encourage and enlighten principals in non-pilot schools for counselling to support counsellors in the discharge of their duties.

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