

**CHALLENGES OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
DURING “PRACTICUM” EXERCISE**

Author:

Bolu-Steve Foluke Nike (Ph.D)¹
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Reviewers:

Ferenc Mező (Ph.D)
University of Eszterházy Károly

Katalin Mező (Ph.D)
University of Debrecen

...and two other anonymous reviewers

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Abstract

Practicum is a platform designed for counsellors-in-training to assist them to become full professional counsellors. Practicum exercise is one of the major processes for gaining mastery of key concepts in counselling. The detached between theory and practice is a major challenge. This research, therefore focused on the challenges of guidance and counselling students in University of Ilorin during practicum. The descriptive study was adopted in this study. The researcher employed the use of simple random technique to select 220 undergraduate students in the Department of Counsellor Education University of Ilorin. The developed questionnaire was titled “Challenges of Practicum Exercise Questionnaire (CPEQ)”. This was adopted to gather information from the respondents. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.70. The demographic data were analyzed using percentages. Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The obtained result showed that lack of adequate facilities for practicum exercise, inadequate mastery of counselling skills and inability to synthesize concepts during presentation are the major challenges. All the hypotheses were accepted. Based on these findings, it was recommended that students in training should constantly engage in micro counselling in the laboratory, this will assist them to gain mastery of counselling procedures and thereby overcome challenges on the field.

Keywords: Challenges, Practicum, Guidance & Counselling

Discipline: pedagogy

¹ Bolu-Steve, Foluke Nike (Ph.D), Department of Counsellor Education University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. E-mail adress:bolu-steve.fn@unilorin.edu.ng. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8055-2670>

Absztrakt**AZ EGYETEMI HALLGATÓK IRÁNYÍTÁSÁNAK ÉS TANÁCSADÁSÁNAK KIHÍVÁSAI A “PRAKTIKUM” GYAKORLAT ALATT AZ ILORINI EGYETEMEN**

Háttér és cél: a “Practicum” egy platform az Ilorini Egyetem tanácsadó képzésében résztvevő hallgatók számára, a teljes körűen professzionális tanácsadónak válás segítése érdekében. A “Practicum” során sajátítják el a hallgatók a tanácsadás kulcsfogalmait. Az elmélet és a gyakorlat közötti elszakadás komoly kihívást jelent, ezért jelen kutatás az Ilorini Egyetemen megvalósuló “Practicum” képzési és tanácsadási kihívásaira összpontosít. *Módszer:* a szerző egyszerű véletlenszerű technikát alkalmazva kiválasztott 220 egyetemi hallgatót az Ilorini Egyetem Tanácsadói Oktatási Tanszékén, akiket a „Challenges of Practicum Exercise Questionnaire (CPEQ)” kérdőív segítségével kérdeztek meg. A kérdőív megbízhatósági együtthatója 0,70. *Eredmények:* a “Practicum” során a szükséges eszközök hiánya, a tanácsadási készségek nem megfelelő elsajátítása és az előadás közbeni fogalmak szintetizálásának képtelensége jelenti a legnagyobb kihívást. A szerző javaslatként megfogalmazta, hogy a képzésben résztvevő hallgatók folyamatosan vegyenek részt a laboratóriumi mikro tanácsadásban, mely segíti őket a tanácsadási eljárások elsajátításában, és ezáltal a terepen jelentkező kihívások leküzdésében.

Kulcsszavak: kihívások, gyakorlat, útmutatás és tanácsadás

Diszciplína: neveléstudomány

Introduction

Education is one of the major ways of alleviating poverty and improving the socio-economic status of a nation and this in turn raises the quality of life. Education is therefore recognized globally as the ultimate backbone for the development of a nation. Unlike primary education which concentrates on the attainment of literacy and the acquisition of skills, university education rather focuses on specialized knowledge. It is necessary to identify that education must reflect the needs, values, aspirations and demands of the society (Nesbitt et al, 2023). Attaining a counselling degree at the university exposes students to independent and creative thought patterns. Counsellors services in schools were emphasized in the National Policy on Education (Durosaro, 2016). Counselling is a face-to-face relationship between the client and the counsellor (Akinade 2002). The counsellor assists clients who have emotional, and psychological problems, personal-social problems or career choice challenges

(Idowu, 2016). This process is a collaborative effort between the professional helper and the client under satisfactory mutual consent and trust.

A professional counsellor must have a least a first-degree certificate from guidance and counselling in a reputable university (Yahaya, 2016). The four years of training and preparation are expected to lead to competence and certification (Fajoyomi, 2016). The student counsellor needs to gain mastery of both practical and course content. The practicum exercise creates the opportunity for the students in training to practicalize the strategies and theories they have learnt in the classroom. The training of a counsellor requires that the trainee undergo a compulsory practicum exercise experience in a real counselling session, as such it exposes the trainee to the world of work (Idowu, 2016). This process assists counsellors in training to have first-hand experience on how to handle diverse challenges and also develop self-confidence in dealing with clients' problems (Akinade, 2002). This pro-

cess equally eliminates fear and reduces initial anxiety they may encounter during the counselling session. According to Okobiah (2006) applying counselling skills is an uphill task for student counsellors. This process gives the trainee ample opportunity to use these skills under supervision.

According to (Sturmer, 2023) the exposure of these students to practicum cannot be overemphasized in guidance and counselling training. Fajoyomi (2016) highlighted that practicum exposes the student counsellor to the world of work, assists in the application of skills in life situations and uncovers the realities of the counselling profession. Akinade (2002) explained the types of practicum that students are likely to be exposed to are macro and micro practicum. The micro practicum is different experiences gathered from the practicum laboratory using classmates while the macro practicum exposes students to real-life experiences at places where they are posted. This is usually outside the laboratory setup.

In the training process, there are lots of challenges encountered by student counsellors during practicum. The application of theory to practice is a major problem for student counsellors. The case of what is usually referred to as the phenomenon of counsellor rigidity is felt not only in the issue of selecting techniques but also in choosing an appropriate theory to apply in the area of holding a supervisory function with the individual in question (Lugton, 2000). Most students according to Denga (2004) find it difficult to locate schools and institutions where to carry out practicum activities. When they are accepted, the school facilities may not be available for use. In addition, the issue of securing materials needed for practicum is a challenge for most undergraduate students. Acquiring an appropriate setting, especially for non-school practicum is often difficult because most agencies do not accept practicum students (Tuli & File, 2009). The uncooperative attitude of such institutions has undermined students' counselling

experience (Udoh & George 2014). Most students lack the confidence to carry out practicum activities, they often approach counselling sessions with anxiety and this robs them of self-assurance, which gets them stranded during their interactions with students (Sumarah, 2009). Similarly, the attitude of school authorities and teachers towards counsellors in training is a challenge. Sometimes students who need help are reluctantly assisted due to external influence from either the school management or the school counsellor (Egwu, 2015). Some clients display negative attitudes toward the counsellors because of the superstitious beliefs and negative values that they have acquired over the years (Saricoban, 2010). Clients with such a stance are difficult to deal with upcoming counsellors. According to Gan (2013), the communication gap could also be a challenge; student counsellors are sometimes stuck up during counselling sessions, especially when dealing with students who cannot speak the English language. Also, most clients do not have confidence in the student counsellors because they believe that counsellors in training are not experienced enough to handle issues (Sumarah, 2010). The general assumption that counselling is all about advising the client makes probing problems difficult for counsellors in training (Merc, 2010).

Rogers developed the client-centred theory in the year 1940. He worked on nondirective counselling. He believes that emphasis should be placed on the clients. The assumption of this theory is believes that people are trustworthy and they are capable of resolving their own problems. Rogers also considers that human beings enjoy self-directed growth if they are assisted during the counselling process (Macmillan, 2004). The theory highlighted three major areas that the therapist must focus on during counselling and they are:

Congruence (genuineness). Rogers explains that the relationship between the two parties must be congruent. This is the most important stage because it

is compulsory that the counsellor should be genuine, authentic and real during the counselling process. The verbal and nonverbal communication of the counsellor must match. At this level, self-disclosure must be appropriate. When the counsellor displays all these skills, the counselling process is bound to yield a positive result.

Unconditional Positive regard (acceptance and caring). The counsellor must display her genuine and unconditional care for the client. This is often done by the counsellor's non-being judgmental.

The counsellor should accept the client and warmly value the relationship irrespective of the client's state of mind. Rogers believes that the greater the level of acceptance the more responsive the client will be.

Accurate empathic understanding ability (an ability to deeply grasp the subjective world of another person). One of the major duties of a counselor is to accurately understand the client's feelings as he/she opens up in face-to-face interaction. This will assist the client to resolve and recognize the incongruity that exists within. Empathic feelings go beyond reflective feelings. Both parties must have a deep understanding of the client process. Counselling states that man has dignity and worth and as such, every client must be respected. Confidentiality is the hallmark of any therapeutic relationship so counsellors must endeavour to keep the bound of confidentiality concerning their clients. Rogers believes this attitude is communicated to the client by the therapist, those been helped will open up and be less defensive. This is also related to the goal of counselling.

This approach is majorly concerned with the client's present situation rather than the past. The goal of this theory is that clients must be assisted by counsellors so that they become more realistic in their perception, also, the therapist should place emphasis on the need for the clients to value themselves and equally the counsellor should also assist the client to socialize and adaptive in their

behaviours. The counsellor is likely to achieve his/her goals to the maximum when there is a display of unconditional positive regard for the client and empathic understanding. This approach has widely been used to train professionals who relate to and work with a variety of people (Mack, 2021).

The client-centred theory is a non-directive therapy. Non-directive implies that the client determines the direction of the therapy while, the therapist remains almost passive and accepts totally, the client's feelings and behaviour. In non-directive therapy, the therapist does not dominate the client but instead, encourages the client. In conclusion, beginning counsellors find it difficult to use this theory at the initial stage. Most of the concepts in client-centered theory are very relevant to counselling.

Statement of Problem

Practicum exercise is one of the major processes for gaining mastery of key concepts in counselling. The detachment between theory and practice is a major challenge. Most students find it difficult to translate what they have learnt in the classroom into practical concepts on the field. These challenges can be linked to so many factors such as the uncooperative attitude of the society to the counselling profession and the attitude of the counsellor in training to their studies.

The majority of secondary school students who are supposed to be the direct beneficiaries of school practicum exercise are indifferent and this often limits or even prevents counsellors-intraining from carrying out the exercise. This could affect the quality of counsellors produced in the labour market. Tuli, & File (2009) worked on practicum experience in teacher education in Ethiopia, Chaminuka, & Thomas (2014) looked at counselling students' practicum experiences in open distance learning at Zimbabwe Open University while Okobiah (2006) researched on practicum in counselling

training and supervision. None of these researchers focused on the challenges the students in counselling might be encountering, hence the need for this study.

Research Question

What are the challenges encountered by guidance and counselling students during practicum exercise?

Research Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the challenges of guidance and counselling students at the University of Ilorin during practicum exercises based on gender, age, and religion.

Methodology

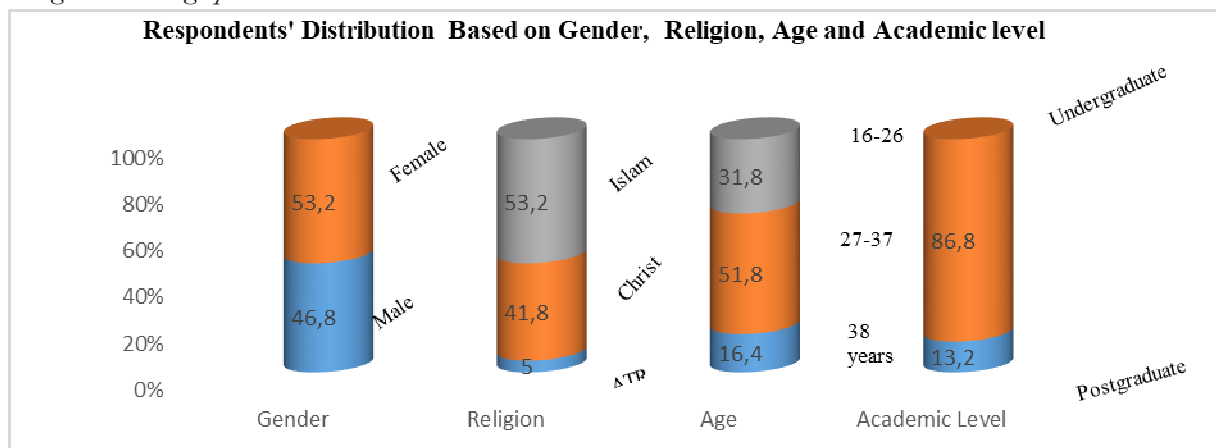
The descriptive study method was adopted in this study. Students at all levels in the Department of counsellor Education are expected to go through this practicum programme. As such, the researcher employed the use of a simple random technique in selecting 220 respondents in the Department. The developed questionnaire titled Challenges of Practicum Exercise Questionnaire

(CPEQ) was adopted to gather information from the respondents. The questionnaire has two major sessions, part A consists of the demographic data and part B has 20 items on challenges during practicum. The validity of the instrument was ascertained and 0.70 was obtained as the reliability coefficient. The analyzed demographic data was done using percentages and all hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Permission was obtained from the university of Ilorin management, especially from the departmental heads assuring them that the data gathered are just for research purposes. Respondents were equally informed about the research and their consent was sought before serving the item. They were assured that the information obtained would be treated with utmost confidentiality. Those who agreed to voluntarily participate in the study were severed with the questionnaire.

Data analysis for the study is presented using descriptive statistics. Bar-chart showing the demographic data on gender, religion, age, and academic level (Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows that 103 (46.8%) were males and females are 117 (53.2%) respectively.

Figure 1: Demographic Data.



In the same vein, 117 (53.2%) are of Islamic religion while 11 (5.0%) are of African Traditional Religion and 92 (41.8%) are Christians. Similarly, 70 (31.8%) of in-school adolescents are between 16-26 years of age, 114 (51.8) of them are between the ages of 27-37 years. Equally 36 (16.4%) of the respondents were 38 years of age and above. Looking at the academic level, 29 (13.2%) of them are postgraduate students, while 191 (86.8%) of the students are undergraduates.

Research Question

What are the challenges encountered by guidance and counselling students at the University of Ilorin during practicum exercise?

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and rank order of the challenges faced by the respondents during the practicum exercise. The table indicates that items 1, 18, and 3 with mean scores of 3.63, 3.29, and 3.29 ranked 1st and 2nd. The items state that as far as I am concerned, challenges faced during practicum exercise are: lack of adequate facilities; inadequate time for proper mastering of counselling skills and techniques; and inability to synthesize and apply the concept in case of presentation respectively.

Since all the items have mean scores that are above the mid-mean score of 2.50, then it can be said that respondents have lots of challenges during practicum exercise.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order of the Challenges Faced by the Respondents during Practicum

Item No.	As far as I am concerned, challenges faced during practicum exercise are:	Mean	SD	Rank
1	lack of adequate facilities for practicum exercise	3.63	.610	1 st
18	inadequate time for proper mastering of counselling skills and techniques	3.29	.786	2 nd
3	inability to synthesize and apply concept in case presentation	3.29	.757	2 nd
2	inappropriate application of basic counselling skills in real life	3.28	.648	4 th
5	display of initial anxiety	3.26	.635	5 th
19	students' unwillingness to cooperate with practicum students	3.22	.603	6 th
17	lack of knowledge in the application of technology in counselling	3.19	.780	7 th
15	lack of support from the school management	3.15	.696	8 th
14	handling of clients with different perception of counselling practice	3.13	.756	9 th
20	refusal of students to be used as sample during practicum	3.09	.649	10 th
4	inability to use their skills to meet drivers clients' needs	3.00	.679	11 th
9	inappropriate use of self-disclosure	2.99	.767	12 th
11	lack of familiarity of students with consultation skills	2.95	.757	13 th
16	improper documentation of practicum reports	2.93	.816	14 th
7	fear of practicing within basic ethical and legal standard of the profession	2.91	.774	15 th
12	students see the programme as irrelevant	2.90	.770	16 th
6	cultural barrier	2.86	.851	17 th
10	stigmatization of counsellors	2.86	.807	17 th
13	hostility from the clients	2.84	.809	19 th
8	religious bias	2.73	.874	20 th

Research Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the challenges of guidance and counselling students at the University of Ilorin during practicum exercises based on gender.

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.77 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96. The hypothesis is accepted because a corresponding p-value of .077 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the challenges of guidance and counselling students at the University of Ilorin during practicum exercises based on religion.

Table 3 revealed showed that the calculated F-ratio of .437 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00. The hypothesis is equally accepted because a p-value of .646 is greater at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the challenges of guidance and counselling students at the University of Ilorin during practicum exercise based on age.

Table 4 revealed that the calculated F-ratio of 1.62 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .200, which is greater at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted based on age.

Table 2. t-test on Challenges Encountered Based on Gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	103	62.48	8.256	218	1.77	1.96	.077
Female	117	60.62	7.251				

Table 3. Analysis of Variance of Respondents Based on Religion

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	Cal. f	Crit. F	p-value
Between groups	53.132	2	26.566	.437	3.00	.646
Within groups	13187.827	217	60.773			
Total	13240.959	219				

Table 4. Analysis of Variance on Challenges Faced by the Respondents during Practicum Exercise Based on Age.

Source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	Cal. f	Crit. F	p-value
Between groups	195.153	2	97.576	1.62	3.00	.200
Within groups	13045.806	217	60.119			
Total	13240.959	219				

Discussion of the Findings

The study has shown that counsellors in training at the University of Ilorin have a lot of challenges during practicum exercises. This process is very important in preparing students in training to be skilful in discharging their duties as counsellors. One of the greatest challenges they encounter as found in the study is the lack of facilities for practicum exercises. Facilities such as counselling labs, psychological test materials etc are not readily available in Nigerian schools (Saricoban, 2010). The distance from home to school, and lack of interest in guidance activities within the school system are major challenges (Udoh & George, 2014). Sometimes student counsellors have their sessions under trees or in a noisy environment.

The gender of the respondents did not differentiate the challenges they encountered. This result is in agreement with that of (Yeasmin, 2018) who affirmed that both male and female students in training experience challenges that they find difficult to surmount during the practicum process. Durosaro (2016) explained that practicum exercise, which is meant to assist the students in training to properly integrate practice and theory, is filled with lots of challenges and these problems are not gender-biased.

This study also found that the religion of the respondents did not influence their opinion on the problems they experience during this process. Gerdien (2011) revealed that religion is a strong force that bounds or divides a group of people and that is why the consequences of religious diversity in education are so complicated. However, irrespective of the student's religious multiplicity they all acknowledged that there are many challenges they encountered during the practicum exercise (Zakaria, 2013).

Maturity is a key factor that assists in handling challenges of life but in this study, no significant difference was found based on age. This finding is in agreement with Rodrigues (2013) who explained

that challenges are normal processes for upcoming counsellors, but the way such problems are handled assists them to gain mastery of counselling concepts. On the other hand, William (2013) found that age and years of practising counselling profession could influence how people handle challenges. That is the reason why most students prefer elderly counsellors, as they are perceived to be mature, experienced and knowledgeable in handling various issues during counselling.

Students in training should constantly equip themselves by engaging in micro counselling in the laboratory before going out. This will assist them to gain mastery of counselling procedures and thereby overcome challenges on the field. The school authorities should assist by providing the students with the necessary facilities needed for practicum activities in schools. On-site, the supervisor should be readily available to assist student counsellors in handling challenges during practicum exercises. Lecturers should continually emphasize the relevance of practicum exercise to the counselling profession.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the majority of the guidance and counselling students agreed that they experience many challenges during practicum exercises. All the items have mean scores that are above the mid-mean score of 2.50. Challenges encountered by students on practicum include lack of adequate facilities for practicum, inadequate time for proper mastering of counselling skills and techniques and inability to synthesize and apply the concept in case presentation. In addition, no significant difference was found in the challenges of guidance and counselling students at the University of Ilorin during practicum exercise based on gender, religion and age.

Students in training should constantly practice by engaging in micro counselling in the laboratory, this will assist them to gain mastery of counselling

procedures and thereby overcome challenges in the field. The school authorities should assist the student counsellor by providing the necessary facilities needed for practicum activities in schools. On-site supervisor should be readily available to assist student counsellor in handling challenges during practicum exercise. Lecturers should continually emphasize the relevance of practicum to counselling profession

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