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## **Perceived Role of Counselling Services in Reducing Academic Failure among Education Students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State**

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**Abstract:** This study analyzed students' perceptions of the role of counselling services in reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. Three research questions were raised and answered. The research design adopted was the descriptive survey, with a population of 526 final year students of the Faculty of Education from which a sample of 100 respondents were randomly selected. A researcher-designed instrument named 'Students' Perceptions of Counselling Services for Reducing Academic Failure Questionnaire' (SPCSRAFQ), with a reliability index of 0.74 was used to collect the data. The data were analyzed using the simple mean. The findings showed that there were counselling services available for reducing academic failure, notably the appraisal, orientation, information, and so on. Furthermore, reasons for not seeking counselling among others included unpopularity of counselling services and fear of being victimized using the information provided by them. The strategies for reducing academic failure included ensuring that the counsellors hold regular orientation for the students, among others. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made which includes organizing activity-oriented counselling, applying cognitive restructuring therapy in disabusing the minds of the students about the roles of counselling among others.

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**Keywords:** counselling services, role, academic failure, strategies, students' perceptions

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### **Introduction**

Education is an important instrument for bringing about change and improves the knowledge base of a nation. Education is disseminated through instruction in a classroom situation, and may be acquired by individuals of all ages. This type of education can be acquired through primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the education system. Consequently, educated individuals also utilize such knowledge information, skills and abilities to promote developments, changes and wellbeing of their communities. It is also for the same reason that the nations invest heavily in the education industry to ensure that the living conditions of its citizens are sustained and economic activities are increased (Kapur, 2020). Since education is a complex process based on mutual interaction of many factors, there is bound to be one problem or the other in the process of its acquisition. Among the students, one of such problems they may be confronted with is academic failure, which is known to be based on different and versatile reasons. The reasons for academic failure are explained with not only characteristics related to family and school, but also individual characteristics of the student, school resources and institutional environment which are also known to affect educational outcomes (Onder, 2016:9).

When students fail their examinations, they may be unable to understand the exact concept that led to their failure. This place a lot of stress and burden on them academically, psychologically and socially. Moreover, what causes students to fail their examination could be much more than their understanding of concepts. These may be unlimited to low commitment with their studies, drug use, lack of motivation or interest, and lack of parental

involvement/supervision (Khan, Ahmad & Kousar, 2011: 277). Therefore, students who are affected by academic failure require counselling services in order to assist them overcome their anxieties and worries.

Counselling is the relationship between a caring person and a person who needs it (Bett, 2013:477; Getachew, 2020:223). The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) states that “Formal Counselling is performed by a professional counsellor who acts in a particular role and follows a recognized code of ethics that requires confidentiality, accountability, supervision and ongoing professional development” (Falzon, Frendo, & Muscat, 2019:3; Felicia, Yusif, Agyeman & Kwasi, 2018:68). WHO report showed that many mental conflicts have influenced students to commit suicide, genocide, alcoholism and drug abuse. For others; depression, stress, anxiety and psychosomatic illness have increased among students compared to the situation in the past (Mugwang’a & Achieng, 2019:4; Odebode, 2020:7).

Furthermore, the field of counselling services is when a counsellor holds a session with a student (Anuar, Mahmud & Karim, 2019:408; Brown, 2020:18). Among the forms of services provided are individual counselling sessions that involves the counsellor and an individual student. The purpose is to discuss student problems and help students solve problems. Individual counselling is more about personal matters and confidentiality. Besides that, there are students who come to meet the counsellor just to get guidance on how to study. In this case, the counsellor needs to conduct a guidance session in order to give guidance to the students (Branco & Bayne, 2020:272).

According to UNESCO (2010), adolescents are prone to behavioral challenges which require adequate counselling for them to overcome the challenges. Students assume the role of the counsellor to be a coordinator or leader and mention that misunderstandings of the role of school counsellors still exist (Aydin & Odaci, 2020:1). However, they may not be aware that confidentiality is a very important factor in counselling between clients and counsellors (Doshi, Robak, Grffin & Ward, 2020:3). Factors concerned with confidentiality have prevented students from seeing counsellors in order to solve their problems. This is because the students are worried that their weaknesses and problems divulged to the counsellor, may be used against them later. For instance, they may be worried that counsellors would contact their parents and teachers. They also think that counsellors will misunderstand them and direct them to do something they dislike (Šarić, Jeznik, Mažgon, & Mrvar, 2020:117). Students Counselling service is originated to offer help and assistance to students who are faced with educational or academic related challenges ranging from poor concentration, truancy/absenteeism, examination worries/anxieties, academic stress, academic failure, academic inefficiency, lack of time management skill, poor study habits, poor academic performance, dropout and other school or academic related problems that inhibit learning process. Some of these challenges are not conspicuous or recognized by teachers, students or parents but go a long way in affecting the overall wellbeing and academic outcome of the students. Onyekuru (2010) noted that counsellors monitor the academic progress of students to discover and identify the reasons for good and poor performance in their chosen subject areas. These counselling services offered within the school system covers three major areas notably academic, personal-social and vocational. The trained school counsellor is in the best position to apply appropriate therapeutic counselling interventions in facilitating adjustment of students with poor academic records and strengthen academic ability and efficacy. These are possible through the support and cooperation of teachers and school management team, without which students counselling process might be frustrated and rendered ineffective.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Academic failure has become a cause for concern among university students in recent times. When academic failure occurs, it causes a setback for the students due to their workload and this means carrying over their courses or withdrawing from the programme. However, this could have been prevented only if they seek proper guidance before its occurrence. This is because guidance and counselling services help the students to overcome the frustrations due to academic failure.

The introduction of guidance and counselling services in the Nigerian tertiary institutions was based on the premise that it would enhance the academic, social and personal development of the students. It is also intended to assist the students to make achievable career choices and decisions. Unfortunately, the counselling services provided in the institutions may not have the attention it deserves, coupled with the fact that the students may not be aware that such services could be of help to them. In view of the foregoing, the study has become imperative due to its immense benefit to the students in helping them develop some awareness of opportunities in the society through relevant and useful information and in helping them to make appropriate, satisfactory personal and educational choices.

Previous studies have evaluated the impact of guidance services or their existence if at all within the school system (Agbakuribe & Ogwuche, 2021:23; Aji, 2013:78; Aluede & Adubale, 2020:56). None of such studies have examined perceived role of counselling services in reducing academic failure especially in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. It is against this backdrop that the present study has become imperative.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to investigate perceived role of counselling services in reducing academic failure among Education students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1 analyze students perceptions of the types of counselling services provided, in reducing the academic failure of students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State.
- 2 determine the challenges the students encounter in seeking counselling services for academic failure in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State.
- 3 identify the strategies that could be adopted for the improvement of counselling services in reducing academic failure of students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State.

## **Research Questions**

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1 What are the types of counselling services provided for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University of Bayelsa State?
- 2 What are the challenges of the students in seeking counselling services for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University of Bayelsa State?
- 3 What are the strategies that could be adopted for the improvement of counselling services for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University of Bayelsa State?

## **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey in order to describe the characteristics of the phenomena of the study in making generalization (Nwankwo, 2016). This research design was considered appropriate for the present study because it required the opinion of the respondents in order to draw conclusion on the subject matter. The population of the study consisted of all 400 Level students in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University

which comprised 526 students (Faculty of Education, 2022). This was made up of the Department of Arts Education (171), Educational Foundations (117), Science Education (83), Department of Social Science Education (41) and the Department of Vocational and Technology Education (114).

A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample for the study. From each Department, 19% of its population was selected to make up the sample as follows: (32, 22, 16, 8 and 22) 400 Level students were selected from each of the five Departments respectively. Therefore, the sample size for this study comprised 100 respondents. The justification for selecting the 400 Level students is because they are more mature and have stayed long enough in the university to have knowledge of the counselling services provided in institution.

The instrument for the study was a researcher-constructed questionnaire titled "Students' Perceptions of Counselling Services for Reducing Academic Failure Questionnaire (SPCSRAFAQ)". It was a four-point rating scale, containing 15 items sub-divided according to the variables used. It consists of three sub-areas evaluating types of Guidance and Counselling services provided for reducing academic failure, challenges of the students in seeking counselling services and the strategies that could be adopted for the improvement of counselling services in the university. The response pattern consisted of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree. These were rated as 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was submitted to three experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Educational Foundations in the Niger Delta University, to ascertain its face and content validity. The corrections and suggestions made by the experts were used to modify the final version of the instrument, which was adjudged to be valid.

The reliability of the instrument was determined by the test-re-test method. This involves administering the instrument to 30 respondents that were not part of the sample, twice within an interval of two weeks. The two sets of scores were then correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to establish the reliability, which yielded a coefficient of 0.74. Thus, the instrument was reliable. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher, with the help of two trained research assistants who administered the instrument to the various Departments. The researcher explained the aim of the research and what the respondents were expected to do, after which they were administered and collected immediately after completion. The response from the questionnaire was analyzed using the descriptive statistic of mean. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as a guide for decision making, to either accept, or reject an item. A mean equal or greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 was accepted and any mean score below 2.50 was not accepted.

## Results

**Table1:** Mean and Standard Deviation Responses on Types of Counselling Services

Available for Reducing Academic Failure			N = 100		
S/N	ITEM		X	SD	DECISION
1.	Information	3.15	1.57	Accepted	
2.	Placement	3.02	1.52	Accepted	
3.	Appraisal	3.25	1.62	Accepted	
4.	Orientation	3.09	1.55	Accepted	
5.	Follow-up and Evaluation	3.16	1.58	Accepted	

From the data presented in Table 1, it revealed that all the items have mean scores ranging from 3.02 to 3.16, which are all above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that all the respondents agreed that the 5 items such

as the appraisal, follow up/evaluation, information, orientation and lastly placement services were the types of counselling services provided for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University.

**Table 2:** Mean and SD Responses on the Challenges of Students in Seeking Counselling Services

S/N	ITEM	X	SD	DECISION
6.	Lack of awareness of counselling services.	3.31	1.65	Accepted
7.	Students' misconceptions about counselling Services.	3.35	1.67	Accepted
8.	Unpopularity of counselling services.	3.35	1.67	Accepted
9.	Non-inclusion of counselling on school Time table.	2.99	1.45	Accepted
10.	Effect of religious/cultural beliefs.	3.28	1.64	Accepted

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that all the statements have mean scores ranging from 2.99 to 3.35, which are all above the mean cut-off of 2.50. This implies that all the respondents agreed that the 5 statements which include (unpopularity of guidance and counselling services, students' misconception about counselling services, lack of awareness of counselling services, effect of religious/cultural beliefs and lastly non-inclusion of counselling on the school's time table), were the challenges of students in seeking counselling services for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University.

**Table 3:** Mean Responses on the Strategies Adopted for the Improvement of Counselling Services

S/N	ITEM	X	SD	DECISION
11.	Carrying out orientation programmes	3.33	1.67	Accepted
12.	Provision of quality leadership	3.09	1.55	Accepted
13.	Meeting the needs of clients	3.58	1.79	Accepted
14.	Availability of funds	3.19	1.58	Accepted
15.	Inclusion of guidance and counselling programme in the School curriculum	2.88	1.45	Accepted

From the data presented in Table 3 it revealed that all the items have mean scores ranging from 2.88 to 3.58, which are all above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that all the respondents agreed that the 5 statements such as (carrying out orientation programmes, provision of quality leadership, meeting the needs of clients, availability of funds and inclusion of guidance and counselling programme in the school Curriculum were the

strategies that could be adopted for the improvement of counselling services for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In research question one, data analysis in Table 1 revealed that information service, placement service, appraisal service, orientation service and follow up and evaluation service were types of counselling services provided for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University. In support of this finding, Agbejor and Alordiah (2014:110) revealed earlier that school counselling services are specifically mirrored in the three areas which are educational, vocational and psychosocial-personal counselling. These services can either be in group or individual, that is, effective counselling services that help to preserve educational values through the modification of individual student's academic performance, emphasizing that this can be achieved through individual and group counselling. While individual counselling is a professional, educative and therapeutic relationship between a troubled student (client) and a counsellor to initiate positive change or otherwise for adjustment in making informed decisions, group counselling involves professional, educative and therapeutic relationship of one or more counsellors and a group of students (clients), who are experiencing similar or almost the same problems in any or all of educational, vocational and psychosocial-personal areas. In this case, the group members can be from two to ten (Agbejor & Alordiah, 2014:110).

In research question two, data analysis in Table 2 revealed that lack of awareness of counselling services, students' misconceptions about counselling services, unpopularity of counselling services, non-inclusion of counselling on the school time table and effect of religious/cultural beliefs were the challenges of students in seeking counselling services for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University. The findings of this study is in line with the report of Šarić, Jeznik, Mažgon, and Mrvar (2020:117) who maintained that some of these reasons have caused students to be worried that their weaknesses and problems told to the counsellor will may be used against them later. Moreover, they pointed out that the counsellor may likely contact their parents and teachers concerning the problems they had entrusted in their hands. They also think counsellors will misunderstand them and will direct them to do something they disliked. Also, the findings of Branco and Bayne (2020:272) reported that there are students who go to the counsellor just to get guidance on how to study. In this case, the counsellor needs to conduct a guidance session in order to assist such students. Other reasons similar to this as observed by Anagbogu, Nwokolo, Anyamene, Anyachebelu and Umezulike, (2013:97) showed that several factors are militating against the effective provision of counselling services in Nigeria, which include lack of trained counsellors, inadequate funding and lack of counselling equipment.

In research question three, data analysis in Table 3 revealed that carrying out orientation programmes, provision of quality leadership, availability of funds, meeting the needs of the clients and the inclusion of school guidance into the curriculum were the strategies that could be adopted for the improvement of counselling services for reducing academic failure in Niger Delta University. The findings are in agreement with Oderinde and Muraina, (2014:1) who stated that the need for appropriate implementation of counselling services at all levels of education is very essential. They reiterated that this is well attested to from the academic performance of students, suggesting counsellors' incompetency in the discharge of their duties.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that there were adequate counselling services available for reducing academic failure, including the appraisal, orientation, information services, etc. The challenges of students in seeking counselling services for reducing academic failure highlighted among others were misconceptions about counselling services,

lack of popularity of counselling and so on. Lastly, the strategies that could be adopted for the improvement of counselling services for reducing academic failure among others were mainly making funds available, organizing orientation services, meeting the needs of the client and the inclusion of school guidance and counselling programme into the curriculum which will stimulate students' interest and apparently enhance their academic achievement in Niger Delta University.

### **Recommendations**

1. Although the findings showed that there were adequate counselling services provided, these should be put into full use by the counsellor in order to create more awareness among the students on the value of guidance and counselling in their academic and vocational aspirations. This means that there should be more of activity oriented counselling, aimed at reducing academic failure among Education students in the university.
2. Counsellors should adopt the cognitive restructuring therapy in disabusing the minds of the students concerning their misconceptions of the role of the counsellor, especially as regards confidentiality of the information that they provide during counselling.
3. In improving the provision of counselling services, the strategies that could be adopted includes organizing regular orientation programmes, the provision of funds and creating awareness concerning the services available that could help the students in overcoming academic failure.

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