

**UTILIZATION OF ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS FOR ENHANCING COUNSELLING PRACTICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of the study was to determine the extent counsellors utilized active listening skills in enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. Five research questions and five null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance. Related and relevant literatures were reviewed under conceptual framework, theoretical studies, theoretical framework, and review of related empirical studies. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study was made up of 301 secondary school guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors in the 298 public secondary schools in Enugu State under the control of Post-Primary School Management Board. It is made of 56 Guidance counsellors and 245 teacher counsellors in the public secondary school in Enugu State. The entire population of 301 secondary school guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors in public secondary schools in Enugu State was used for the study, because the population is manageable. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Estimate. The overall reliability coefficient was .76, indicating that the instrument is reliable and suitable for the study. 301 copies of questionnaire were administered by the researcher with the help of six research assistants that were properly briefed on the content of the questionnaire and its mode of administration to ensure that the questionnaire was properly administered. Out of the 301 copies of the instrument administered only 287 copies were correctly filled and returned. 14 copies were not returned. Data collected was analyzed using Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) with Standard Deviation (SD) to answer the five research questions. However, each of the null hypotheses was tested using t-test statistic at .05 level of significance. From the result of the findings, it was concluded that guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors to a great extent utilized active listening skills, paraphrasing skills and questioning skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. However, it was revealed that guidance counsellors and teachers-counsellors to a little extent utilized empathy skills and non-verbal communication skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. Comparison of the guidance counsellors and teacher-counsellors showed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors on the extent to which active listening skills, paraphrasing skills, questioning skills, empathy skills and non-verbal communication skills were utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended among others that deliberate efforts should be made by the government and school authorities at motivating and strengthening the activities of counselling in secondary schools in Enugu State*

**Keywords: Utilization, Active Listening, Skills, Enhancing, Counseling and Practice**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Counselling is an interactive relationship that exists between the client(s) and the expert (counsellor). It involves effective communication skills necessary for the resolution of clients' problem. The American Counselling Association (2018), defined counselling as a collaborative effort/communication between the counsellor and the client with the goal of helping the client to identify potential solution to the problems at hand which cause the client emotional turmoil, strengthen self-esteem and promote behaviour change and optimal mental health. The counsellor, by virtue of his/her training, has mastered some skills, theories, principles or conceptual models that can be applied to the specific problems/issues presented by the client. Onah (2018), perceived counselling as a helping approach that highlights the emotional and intellectual experience of a client; a client's feeling and what they think about the problem they have sought help for.

Counselling as a concept is defined according to the perception of the author and the environment in which he is writing. In this study the researcher is of the view that counselling is a transformative process of helping people to resolve their difficulties and learn all that are to be learnt both in and outside the school through a viable communication medium. Ugwu and Agbo (2020), viewed counselling as a form of therapeutic help offered to people to enable them understand and resolve their adjustment problems. To excel in this, the counsellor should actively listen to the Client by employing actively listening skills to the one-to one relationship.

Active listening is an important way to bring about personality changes in attitudes and the way one behaves towards others and oneself. According to Eze (2015), active listening is a communication skill that is fundamental for effective counselling relationship. For Obizie (2020) active listening is listening without passing judgments but reflecting back on what has been said to indicate that the feelings of the speaker have been understood. Okoli (2020) stated that when we listen, people tend to respond in a more democratic and less authoritative way; more mature, become more open to experience and become less defensive. Okobia (2019) noted that active listening forms the basis upon which other higher-level helping responses are built. Okobia added that active listening on the part of the counsellor conveys the impression that he is genuinely interested in helping the client to solve his problem and that the client is unconditionally accepted, regarded, and valued. Onah (2017) posited that active listening happens when you "listen for meaning". The listener says very little but conveys much interest by showing enthusiasm and concern. The listener only speaks to find out if a statement has been correctly heard and understood. Ubaka (2021) revealed that the ground skills which help counsellors in active listening include: awareness of body language, posture, tone of voice, words and body language and the client's body language, however poorly used in the counselling practice. Studies by Onovo (2020) and Ugwu (2021) reported that most counsellors lack active listening skills. Ubaka (2021) revealed that little attention is paid to counsellors' active listening skills. Ubaka (2021:pg.17) added that:

*If the counsellor is not able to listen and decode the client's problems, the counsellor will not be able to communicate her understanding of the client's problem (content) and how he feels about the problem (feeling) or is able to tell the impact of the problem on the client's psychological well-being.*

Being that the psychological well-being of the clients is an area of serious concern in counselling practice, there is need to explore the extent to which guidance counsellors utilize active listening for enhancing counselling practice among in secondary schools in Enugu State.

### **Active Listening Skills**

Active listening is a communication skill which entails listening without passing judgments but reflecting back on what has been said to indicate that the feelings of the speaker have been understood. According to Eze (2015) active listening is a communication skill that is fundamental for effective counselling relationship. Okoli (2018) stated that when we listen, people tend to respond in a more democratic and less authoritative way; more mature, become more open to experience and become less defensive. Okobia (2019) noted that active listening forms the basis upon which other higher-level helping responses are built. Okobia added that active listening on the part of the counsellor conveys the impression that he is genuinely interested in helping the client to solve his problem and that the client is unconditionally accepted, regarded, and valued. Onah (2017) posited that active listening happens when you "listen for meaning". That is to say that the listener says very little but conveys much interest by showing enthusiasm and concern.

In active listening, the listener only speaks to find out if a statement has been correctly heard and understood. Ubaka (2021) revealed that the ground skills which help counsellors in active listening include: awareness of body language, posture, tone of voice, words and body language and the client's body language, however poorly used in the counselling practice. Studies by Onovo (2020) and Ugwu (2021) reported that most counsellors lack active listening skills. Ubaka (2021) revealed that little attention is paid to counsellors' active listening skills. Ubaka added that if the counsellor is not able to listen and decode the client's problems, the counsellor will not be able to communicate her understanding of the client's problem (content) and how he feels about the problem (feeling) or is able to tell the impact of the problem on the client's psychological well-being. Being that the psychological well-being of the clients is an area of serious concern in counseling practice, there is need to explore the extent to which guidance counsellors utilize active listening for enhancing counselling practice among counsellors in secondary schools in Enugu State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is observed that most secondary school counsellors in Enugu State seem not to utilize adequate active listening skills for effective counselling practice. This is often indicated in counsellors inability to foster a strong therapeutic alliance with their clients. However, it is important to note that no counselling process can thrive without good communication skills. This is because counselling itself is a communication process and counsellors who are proficient in this active listening skills are more likely to make accurate diagnoses, detect emotional distress in clients, and have clients who are satisfied with their care and agree with the advice

given. It is also alleged that the poor attitude of students towards counselling in the secondary schools in Enugu State is an indication that most school counsellors lack the requisite skills to influence the behaviour of the students, such skills as active listening skills. Thus, the secondary school students seem to have little or no regard for the counselling practice, probably because of counsellors' poor active listening skills. Hence, school counsellors are losing their place in the secondary schools as some are being sub-summed as teachers and into other functions in the school.

Although, active listening skills have been explored and adopted for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools by stake-holders in education, none to the knowledge of the researcher is targeted towards utilizing active listening skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. This calls for a serious concern as the gap created by this is long overdue.

It is against this backdrop that the researcher is motivated to investigate the extent to which these active listening skills are utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. The problem of this study is, therefore, 'To what extent do counselors utilize active listening skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.'

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is ascertain the extent to which counsellors utilize active listening skills for enhancing counseling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

### **Research Question**

This research question guided the study to what extent do counsellors utilize active listening skills for enhancing counseling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

### **Research Hypothesis**

This null hypothesis was formulated and tested at .05 level of confidence. There is no significant guidance counselors and teachers counselors on the extent to which active listening skills is utilized for enhancing counseling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State

### **Method**

Descriptive survey research design was utilized for this study. Descriptive survey research design, according to Nworgu (2015), is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be a representative of the entire group. A descriptive survey research is concerned with specified population of persons, item or situation, in a defined geographical location. It involves the collection of relevant data for or about the population that enables the description of the person, items or situations the way they are (Alimba,2016). The descriptive survey research design is considered suitable for the study as it will solicit for information from the respondents directly and afford all the respondents equal chance of being chosen for the study.

The research was carried out in Enugu State. Nigeria. Enugu State is one of the five States in South Eastern, Nigeria. It has 17 Local Government Areas with many Federal, State and private secondary schools. It has inter-state boundaries with Kogi and Benue State to the North, Abia State to the South, Anambra State to the West and Ebonyi State to the East. Its capital is Enugu and it is

predominately made up of Igbo speaking people of Nigeria. It is also known for its rich cultural heritage, artifacts and coal deposit.

The population for the study was made up of 301 secondary school Guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors in the 298 public secondary schools in Enugu State under the control of Post-Primary School Management Board. It was made of 56 Guidance counsellors and 245 teacher counsellors in the public secondary schools in Enugu State. The populations according to the Education Zones are stated thus; Agbani 14 guidance counsellors and 25 teacher counsellors; Awgu 5 guidance counsellors and 57 teacher counsellors; Enugu 16 guidance counsellors and 23 teacher counsellors; Nsukka 6 guidance counsellors and 56 teacher counsellors; Obollo-Afor 6 guidance counsellors and 37 teacher counsellors; and Udi 9 guidance counsellors and 47 teacher counsellors. This is based on the data obtained from the Post-Primary School Management Board Enugu (*PPSMB, 2024/2025*). Pg.144.

The entire population of 301 secondary school guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors in the public secondary schools in Enugu State was used for the study, because the population is manageable.

A structured questionnaire named "Utilization of active listening Skills for Enhancing Counselling Practice Scale (UALSECPs)", developed by the researcher was used for data collection. The instrument have two sections; A and B. Section A contains the respondents bio- data while section B was divided into 5 clusters with 58 items, structured to assist the researcher in providing answers to the research questions that guided the study. Cluster 1 is on the Active listening skills with 11 items, The response format for the instrument is a 4-point

scale of Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Little Extent (LE) and Very Little Extent (VLE). Each response option has a numerical value assigned to it as follows;

Very Great Extent (VGE) = 4 points

Great Extent (GE) = 3 points

Little Extent (LE) = 2 points

Very Little Extent (VLE) = 1 point

In order to ensure the validity of the instrument, three draft copies of the instrument together with the purpose of the study, research questions, hypotheses, scope of the study and the developed instrument were given to three experts. Two experts were from the Department of Guidance and Counselling while the other expert was from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science Education, all from Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The experts were requested to assess the relevance, adequacy, suitability and comprehensiveness of the items in addressing the research questions as well as the clarity of the instruction to the respondents. 8 new items were added, thus the initial 11 generated items were increased to 19 items as suggested by the validators, while double barrel questions and grammatical errors were corrected as well. The validators' comments were used to draft the final instrument that was used for data collection (*Appendix C*) pg. 130.

The reliability of the instrument was determined by administering 30 copies of the questionnaire to a sample of 12 Guidance counsellors and 18 teacher counsellors from public secondary schools in Ebonyi State in a trial test to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. The choice of Ebonyi State was dictated by the fact that both states have similar educational characteristics in terms of administration, population and environment.

The respondents were assured of confidentiality of all the information they supplied. Data collected from the respondents' responses were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Estimate to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The choice of Cronbach Alpha Reliability Estimate was dictated by the research design adopted and the use of multiple choice questions as instrument for data collection in the study. This is line with Taber (2018) which stated that Cronbach Alpha is most commonly used when there are multiple Likert questions in a survey/questionnaire that form a scale.

The instrument was formed in one cluster, each cluster which yielded the reliability coefficient; cluster 1 had .65, The overall reliability coefficient was .76, indicating that the instrument is reliable and suitable for the study. 301 copies of questionnaire were administered by the researcher with the help of six research assistants that were properly briefed on the content of the questionnaire and its mode of administration to ensure that the questionnaire was properly administered. Appointment were scheduled with the respondents for collection at a later date for those who were not be able to fill their own copies of the instrument because of the nature of their job. Out of the 301 copies of the instrument administered only 287 copies were correctly filled and returned. 14 copies were not returned. These copies include 1 copy for the guidance counsellor and 13 copies on the side of the teacher counsellors. The data collected was analyzed using Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) with Standard Deviation (SD) to answer the five research questions. However, each of the null hypotheses was tested using t-test statistic at .05 level of significance. The analysis was done with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

For the decision rule; real limit of the numbers was applied, thus, the upper and lower limits of the mean which is as follows was employed;

Mean scores from 3.50 – 4.49 Very Great Extent (VGE)

Mean scores from 2.50 – 3.49 Great Extent (GE)

Mean scores from 1.50 – 2.49 Little Extent (LE)

Mean scores from 0.50 – 1.49 Very Little Extent (VLE)

For the null hypotheses the bench mark for interpreting the respondents' scores was that the hypotheses was not rejected if the significant level is less than .05 and was rejected if the significant level is equal or more than .05 level of significance.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do counsellors utilize active listening skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent to which Counsellors Utilize Active Listening Skills for Enhancing Counselling Practice in Secondary Schools in Enugu State**

S/ N	Counsellors utilization of active listening for enhancing counselling practice include;	Guidance counsellors (55)			Teacher counsellors (232)			Overall (287)		
		Me	SD	Dec	Me	SD	Dec	Me	SD	Dec
1	paying attention to clients issues	3.75	0.55	VGE	3.68	0.63	VGE	3.69	0.62	VGE
2	using client-lead to enhance client practice	3.25	1.16	GE	3.16	1.21	GE	3.18	1.20	GE
3	maintaining eye contact to encourage client to speak out	3.05	1.08	GE	3.09	1.07	GE	3.08	1.07	GE
4	using body posture to encourage clients	3.25	1.11	GE	3.28	1.09	GE	3.28	1.10	GE
5	avoiding distraction during the counselling session	3.33	0.96	GE	3.35	0.94	GE	3.35	0.94	GE
6	using silence to encourage client in the one-on-one relationship	3.60	0.85	VGE	3.58	0.84	VGE	3.59	0.84	VGE
7	employing summaries of the client's utterances in the counselling process	1.67	0.70	LE	1.77	0.83	LE	1.75	0.80	LE
8	using reflective summaries to enhance clients interest in counseling	3.44	0.71	GE	3.47	0.70	GE	3.46	0.70	GE
9	using facial expression to encourage the client	3.36	0.62	GE	3.39	0.61	GE	3.38	0.61	GE
10	paying attention to clients' body language	3.35	1.00	GE	3.34	0.98	GE	3.34	0.99	GE
11	encouraging the client use of clues	3.25	1.11	GE	3.28	1.09	GE	3.28	1.10	GE
<b>WEIGHTED AVERAGE</b>		<b>3.20</b>		<b>GE</b>	<b>3.21</b>		<b>GE</b>	<b>3.21</b>		<b>GE</b>

**Key:** SD = Standard Deviation, VGE (3.50 – 4.00) = Very GreatExtent, GE (2.50 – 3.49) = a GreatExtent, LE(1.50 – 2.49) = LittleExtent, VLE (1.00 – 1.49) = Very LittleExtent.

Table 1 shows the results obtained from the counsellors on the extent to which active listening skills is utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. The Table shows that guidance counsellors had mean scores ranging from 1.67 to 3.75, while teacher counsellors had mean scores that ranged from 1.77 to 3.68. The respondents had cluster means of 3.21 and 3.21, with corresponding standard deviations of .93 and .98 respectively. Overall, the mean scores of the respondents ranged from 1.75 to 3.69, with a cluster mean of 3.21 and a standard deviation of .91. The close range of the standard deviations scores suggests that the respondents exhibited uniformity in their responses. The result therefore is that guidance

counsellors and teacher counsellors to a great extent utilized active listening skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors on the extent to which active listening skills is utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State

**Table 2: Mean, SD and t-test Score of Guidance Counsellors and Teacher Counsellors on the Extent to which Active Listening Skills is Utilized for Enhancing counselling Practice in Secondary Schools in Enugu State.**

Counsellors' Type	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig. (2tailed)	Decision
School counsellors	55	32.05	4.96	285	-.067	.947	NS
Teacher counsellors	232	32.10	4.85				

Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of school counsellors and teacher counsellors on the extent to which active listening skills is utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State, with school counsellors (M= 32.05, SD = 4.96 and teacher counsellors' counterpart (M= 32.10, SD = 4.85),  $t(285) = -.067$ ,  $P = .947$  ( $P > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors on the extent to which active listening skills is utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

corresponding standard deviations of .67 and .69 respectively. Overall, the mean scores of the respondents ranged from 2.97 to 3.69, with a cluster mean of 3.49 and a standard deviation of .68. The close range of the standard deviations scores suggests that the respondents exhibited uniformity in their responses. The results show that guidance counsellors and teachers' counsellors to a great extent utilized paraphrasing skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

**Discussion of the Findings**  
**Findings on school counsellors' utilization of active listening skills for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.**

The result revealed that guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors to a great extent utilized active listening skills for

mean scores ranging from 2.93 to 3.76, while teacher counsellors had mean scores that ranged from 2.98 to 3.66. The respondents had cluster means of 3.50 and 3.45, with

enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. This finding is at variance with studies by Onovo (2020) and Ugwu (2021) which reported that most counsellors lack active listening skills. The finding disagreed with Ubaka (2021) who revealed that little attention is paid to counsellors' active listening skills. The finding however agrees with Nnadi and Uzoekwe (2023) who revealed that the counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements were only the listening skills, questioning skills and skill of allowing silence. Being that if the counsellor is not able to listen and decode the client's problems, the counsellor may not be able to communicate her understanding of the client's problem (content) and how he feels about the problem (feeling) or is able to tell the impact of the problem on the client's psychological well-being. Thus, active listening skills should be encouraged among school counsellors for effective counselling practice.

Similarly, the finding revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors on the extent to which active listening skills was utilized for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State. This finding did not agree with Ogbobe (2022) who stated that professional guidance counsellors possess distinct qualities from those of the teacher counsellor. It is noted that guidance counsellors are professionally trained in the field of counselling unlike the teacher counsellor, however the use of active listening skills is indispensable for both guidance counsellors and teacher counsellor in secondary school, hence the need for periodic training of school counsellors on the use of active listening skills for an enhanced

counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

### **Educational Implications of the Findings**

The implications of the findings are that;

If the active listening skills are not properly utilized among guidance counsellors and teachers counsellors for enhancing counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State, effective counselling practice in the secondary schools will be jeopardized. This is because counselling plays a significant role in achieving the objectives and goals of the secondary education. Active listening skills are indispensable in the counselling practice. If the school counsellors do not utilize the communication skills there will be inefficiency in the secondary school counselling practice. Thus, the finding of this study would strengthen guidance counsellors and teacher counsellors utilization of active listening skills for an enhanced practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made.

- The Counselling Association of Nigeria and Enugu Chapter should periodically organize workshop for school counsellors on the use of active listening skills for an enhanced counselling practice in secondary schools in Enugu State.
- The ministry of Education and the Post-Primary Schools Management Board should ensure the school counselors do not have any subject attached to them as this will jeopardize their ability to actively listen to their Client as they are likely to have divided attention in the discharge of their counselling duty.

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