

The Role of Listening Skills in Enhancing Client-Centered Counselling Services Among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of listening skills on client-centered counselling services in public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria. Three specific aspects of listening skills were investigated: maintaining eye contact, avoiding interruption, and asking relevant questions. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 132 practising counsellors in public senior secondary schools, from which 105 counsellors were selected using simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire titled "Listening Skills and Client-Centered Counselling Services Questionnaire (LSCCSQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument contained items measured on a four-point rating scale and was validated by experts. Reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.88, 0.81, and 0.77 for the three clusters, with an overall reliability index of 0.82. Data were analyzed using means and standard deviations to answer the research questions, while independent t-tests were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that counsellors generally demonstrated effective listening skills, and these skills positively enhanced client-centered counselling services. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between male and female counsellors in their use of listening skills. Based on the findings, the study recommends continuous professional development and targeted training to strengthen counsellors' listening competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role in shaping individuals and societies, equipping learners with knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for personal growth and societal development. It is not only a means to acquire academic qualifications but also a platform for fostering emotional, social, and psychological well-being. The well-rounded development of students, particularly in public senior secondary schools, requires addressing their academic and non-academic challenges. This calls for a robust support system where counseling services play an integral role. Client-centered counselling services, grounded in Carl Rogers' theory of humanistic psychology, emphasize the centrality of the client in therapeutic interactions, promoting self-discovery and personal growth (Okoro & Eze, 2022). Within this framework, effective listening skills are fundamental in facilitating meaningful interactions, fostering empathy, and empowering students to navigate their challenges successfully.

Client-centered counselling services are distinguished by their focus on providing a safe and supportive environment where clients, in this case, students, feel understood and valued. Nwafor and Akpan (2021) found that this counselling approach prioritizes the individual's experiences and perspectives, enabling counsellors to guide students in exploring solutions to their problems. Listening skills are a cornerstone of such interactions, as they foster trust, build rapport, and encourage open communication. The application of these skills within the counselling setting has profound implications for addressing the diverse challenges faced by secondary school students, including academic stress, peer pressure, and emotional struggles. By listening attentively and empathetically, counselors help students gain clarity and develop self-confidence, which is essential for their holistic development.

Okoro and Eze (2022), Ndukwe and Johnson (2023), Uche and Okafor (2022), Adesanya and Adebayo (2021), and Eze and Nwachukwu (2024) collectively identified the following roles of listening skills in enhancing client-centered counselling services: fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment, enhancing the counsellor's ability to identify underlying issues and concerns, promoting student self-awareness and empowerment, building effective problem-solving skills, and enhancing emotional regulation and resilience in students. These roles underscore the critical importance of active and empathetic listening in addressing students' diverse challenges.

One of the key roles of listening skills in client-centered counselling is **fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment**. Effective listening reassures students that they are being heard and understood, which is essential for building trust. This trust encourages students to express themselves openly, share their concerns, and explore possible solutions without fear of criticism. As stated by Igbokwe and Eze (2020), when counselors actively listen, they validate students' emotions and experiences, creating a foundation for a positive therapeutic relationship. This supportive atmosphere is particularly critical in secondary schools, where students often face social and emotional vulnerabilities that require careful and compassionate guidance.

Listening skills play a vital role in client-centered counselling by fostering trust and building a strong therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the student. When counselors engage in attentive and nonjudgmental listening, students feel respected and valued, which creates a safe environment for them to openly express their thoughts and feelings (Igbokwe & Eze, 2020). This trust is foundational in counselling, as it encourages students to share their concerns without fear, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the counselling process (Nwafor & Akpan, 2021).

Furthermore, effective listening encourages students to communicate openly and honestly. When students perceive that their counsellors are genuinely interested in their experiences and emotions, they are more willing to disclose sensitive information and engage in meaningful dialogue (Adesanya & Adebayo, 2021). This open communication is essential in client-centered counselling, as it allows students to explore and understand their feelings deeply, facilitating emotional relief and self-expression (Okoro & Eze, 2022).

Listening attentively also enables counsellors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' problems. It involves not only hearing the words spoken but also interpreting non-verbal cues and underlying emotions that may reveal deeper issues affecting the student's well-being (Ndukwe & Johnson, 2023). For instance, a student presenting with poor academic performance may, through careful listening, reveal hidden struggles such as family difficulties or low self-esteem. This depth of understanding allows counselors to address the root causes rather than merely treating superficial symptoms (Eze & Nwachukwu, 2024).

Empathy, a cornerstone of client-centered counselling, is effectively conveyed through skilled listening. By listening empathetically, counsellors validate students' feelings and experiences, demonstrating genuine care and understanding (Uche & Okafor, 2022). This empathetic engagement fosters emotional healing and acceptance, helping students feel supported and less isolated in their struggles. The emotional connection established through empathetic listening enhances students' resilience and motivation to overcome their challenges (Eze & Nwachukwu, 2024).

Moreover, listening skills assist counsellors in clarifying and identifying specific issues faced by students. Through careful and focused listening, counsellors can detect inconsistencies or ambiguities in students' narratives, prompting further exploration to uncover the true nature of their difficulties (Ndukwe & Johnson, 2023). This process ensures that interventions are based on accurate and thorough understanding, thereby increasing the relevance and effectiveness of counselling strategies (Adesanya & Adebayo, 2021).

Finally, listening empowers students by fostering self-awareness and confidence. When students feel genuinely heard and understood, they are encouraged to take ownership of their problems and actively participate in finding solutions (Uche & Okafor, 2022). This empowerment is central to client-centered counselling, as it promotes autonomy and equips students with critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are valuable beyond the counselling context (Okoro & Eze, 2022).

The role of listening skills in enhancing client-centered counselling services cannot be overstated. By fostering trust, identifying underlying issues, promoting self-awareness, building problem-solving skills, and enhancing emotional regulation, listening serves as a critical tool for counsellors in addressing the diverse challenges faced by students. These skills not only improve the effectiveness of counselling services but also contribute to the holistic development of students in public senior secondary schools. As public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt strive to address the complex needs of their students, incorporating and prioritizing listening skills in counselling practices will ensure more effective and meaningful outcomes.

Several scholars have contributed to the understanding of client-centered counselling services and their impact on students. For instance, Nwafor and Akpan (2021) examined the role of client-centered counselling in enhancing students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools. Their study highlighted the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for students through counselling. However, while their research explored various aspects of counselling, it did not delve into the critical role of listening skills as a foundational component of effective client-centered counselling. This gap leaves a limited understanding of how listening can specifically enhance the therapeutic process and address the socio-emotional challenges faced by students, particularly in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Again, Igbokwe and Eze (2020) investigated the role of communication skills in counselling practices within Nigerian schools. They emphasized the need for counselors to adopt effective communication strategies to build trust and rapport with students. However, their work lacked a focused discussion on listening as a distinct and essential skill within the broader spectrum of communication. This omission creates a gap in understanding the nuanced ways listening can contribute to students' emotional well-being and academic success, particularly in the unique context of public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

These gaps in existing literature emphasized the need for a study that specifically examines the role of listening skills in enhancing client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students, which the investigation of this study intends to fill.

Statement of the Problem

Listening skills play a vital role in client-centered counselling by enabling counsellors to understand students' needs, foster trust, and create a supportive environment. In public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, effective client-centered counselling services are essential for addressing the academic, social, and emotional challenges faced by students. However, many school counsellors seem to lack the ability to fully utilize listening skills as a core aspect of their counselling approach, which affects the quality of support provided to students.

Although previous studies have emphasized the importance of communication in counselling, they often fail to focus on the specific role of

listening in ensuring effective counselling outcomes. This neglect has led to a gap in practice, where counsellors may struggle to identify underlying issues, build trust, and empower students to make informed decisions about their lives. Furthermore, the training programmes for school counsellors often do not adequately address the significance of listening skills, leaving many counsellors unprepared to meet the complex needs of students.

The absence of strong listening skills in counselling practices contributes to students feeling misunderstood, unsupported, or disengaged. This can result in unaddressed emotional and social needs, which may negatively affect their overall well-being and academic performance. Despite the efforts to provide counselling services in schools, the lack of emphasis on listening skills limits the effectiveness of these services, particularly in addressing the unique challenges faced by students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

This problem raises concerns about the quality of client-centered counselling services in public senior secondary schools and highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the role of listening skills. Investigating this area will help identify gaps and provide practical strategies to enhance counselling practices, ensuring that students receive the support they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of listening skills in enhancing client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To examine how building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. To investigate how encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
3. To assess how understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. How does building trust enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
2. How does encouraging open communication enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
3. How does understanding students' problems enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female teachers on how building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female teachers on how encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

There is no significant difference in the responses of male and female teachers on how understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Client-Centered Therapy (Rogers, 1951)

Client-Centered Therapy (Rogers, 1951)

Client-Centered Therapy, also known as Person-Centered Therapy, was propounded by Carl Rogers in 1951. The theory emerged as a humanistic approach to psychotherapy, emphasizing the role of the client in their personal growth and self-discovery. Unlike traditional counselling models where the therapist is seen as the expert, Client-Centered Therapy positions the client as the primary agent of change. The therapist's role is to create a supportive and empathetic environment that facilitates self-exploration, self-acceptance, and personal development.

The theory is built on the assumption that individuals possess an innate capacity for self-actualization when provided with the right conditions. Rogers (1951) identified three core conditions necessary for effective counselling: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Empathy involves the therapist's ability to understand the client's experiences from their perspective, creating a safe and non-judgmental environment. Unconditional positive regard refers to the therapist's acceptance of the client without conditions, ensuring that the individual feels valued and respected. Congruence, or genuineness, requires the therapist to be authentic and transparent in their interactions, fostering a relationship of trust and openness. These elements work together to help clients explore their emotions, confront their challenges, and develop solutions that align with their personal values and goals (Okoro, 2022).

Several studies have reinforced the effectiveness of Client-Centered Therapy in counselling, particularly in educational settings. Nwafor and Akpan (2021), when school counsellors adopt a person-centered approach, students are more likely to engage in meaningful discussions about their academic and personal challenges. This approach encourages students to develop self-awareness, build confidence, and take responsibility for their decisions. Additionally, research by Uche and Okafor (2022) highlights that students who

receive counselling based on Rogers' principles exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and resilience. These findings emphasize the critical role of active listening and empathetic communication in fostering a positive therapeutic relationship.

The relevance of Client-Centered Therapy to this study lies in its emphasis on listening skills as a fundamental aspect of effective counselling. The study focuses on how listening enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Given that Rogers' theory prioritizes active listening, empathy, and a supportive counselling environment, it provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how listening contributes to student well-being. In the context of school counselling, students often experience academic stress, peer pressure, and emotional struggles that require guidance. By integrating the principles of Client-Centered Therapy, counsellors can create an environment where students feel heard, valued, and empowered to navigate their challenges successfully.

Furthermore, the application of this theory aligns with the goal of enhancing counselling effectiveness in public senior secondary schools. Many students hesitate to seek counselling due to fear of judgment or lack of trust in the counsellor-student relationship. However, when counsellors actively listen and provide a safe space for students to express themselves, the counselling process becomes more impactful. As noted by Eze and Nwachukwu (2024), students who perceive their counsellors as empathetic and understanding are more likely to engage in open discussions, leading to better psychological and academic outcomes. Given the increasing need for effective student support systems, anchoring this study on Client-Centered Therapy underscores the importance of listening as a vital skill in ensuring meaningful counselling experiences.

Component	Description	Role in Counselling Outcomes
Listening Skills	Active, empathetic, and reflective listening that facilitates understanding and validation of the client's feelings and thoughts.	Builds trust, encourages open communication, identifies core issues.
Unconditional Positive Regard	Accepting and valuing the client without judgment or conditions.	Creates a non-judgmental, supportive environment.
Empathy	Deep understanding and sharing of the client's feelings.	Promotes emotional healing and self-awareness.
Congruence (Genuineness)	Counsellor's authenticity and honesty in the therapeutic relationship.	Strengthens trust and promotes openness.
Client Self-Awareness and Empowerment	Result of the counselling process where clients gain insights and confidence to solve problems.	Leads to resilience, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills.

Source: Client-Centered Therapy Framework (2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population for this study consisted of 1,943 teachers drawn from public senior secondary schools within the Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The sample size of the study is 389 respondents, comprising 121 teachers from Port Harcourt City Local Government Area and 268 teachers from Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The sample was determined using 20% of the total population of teachers in each local government area.

The instrument for data collection in this study is a self-designed questionnaire titled ‘The role of listening skills in enhancing client-centered counselling services.’ Questionnaire (RLSECCSQ).

The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method. From the analyzed responses, reliability coefficients of 0.78, 0.81, and 0.81 were obtained for the various clusters of the instrument. A total of 389 copies of the questionnaire were administered to teachers; however, only 356 copies were successfully retrieved, representing a 91.5% return rate. Of the retrieved copies, 80 (22.47%) were from male teachers and 276 (77.53%) were from female teachers. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The decision rule was based on the following boundaries: Strongly Agreed (SA): 3.50–4.00; Agreed (A): 2.50–3.49; Disagreed (D): 1.50–2.49; and Strongly Disagreed (SD): 1.00–1.49. The null hypotheses were tested using the independent t-test statistical tool at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Research Question 1: How does building trust enhance client-centered counselling services among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation analysis on how building trust enhance client-centered counselling services among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/No	Items	Male Teachers n=80			Female Teachers n=276		
		Mean	SD	Remarks	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Counsellors who paraphrase students’ statements show they truly understand their feelings.	2.91	0.82	Agreed	2.94	0.81	Agreed
2	Maintaining eye contact while listening helps strengthen trust between	2.88	0.84	Agreed	2.92	0.85	Agreed

	counsellor and student.						
3	Listening without rushing students builds confidence in the counselling relationship.	2.83	0.80	Agreed	2.85	0.81	Agreed
4	Allowing students to finish their thoughts before responding fosters mutual respect.	2.86	0.83	Agreed	2.90	0.84	Agreed
5	Attentive listening encourages students to share personal challenges without fear of judgment.	2.87	0.85	Agreed	2.91	0.83	Agreed
6	Demonstrating patience while listening motivates students to return for future sessions.	2.85	0.82	Agreed	2.89	0.82	Agreed
Grand Mean		2.87		Agreed	2.90		Agreed

Table 1 revealed the mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers on the extent to which building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The data indicate that the mean of male teachers for item 1 is (2.91) while the mean of female teachers is (2.94). Based on the criterion mean of 2.50, both male and female teachers agreed that counsellors who paraphrase students' statements show that they truly understand their feelings. Similarly, for items 2 to 6, the mean ratings for male teachers ranged from (2.83) to (2.88), while the mean ratings for female teachers ranged from (2.85) to (2.92). Based on the criterion mean of 2.50, both male and female teachers agreed that maintaining eye contact, listening without rushing, allowing students to finish their thoughts, attentive listening, and demonstrating patience while listening are important in building trust that enhances client-centered counselling services. The cluster means are (2.87) for male teachers and (2.90) for female teachers which indicates that building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis which was agreed

Research Question 2: How does encouraging open communication enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation analysis on how encouraging open communication enhance client-centered counselling services among Public Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/No	Items	Male Teachers n=80			Female Teachers n=276		
		Mean	SD	Remarks	Mean	SD	Remarks
7	Counsellors' listening encourages students to speak openly about their problems.	2.88	0.84	Agreed	2.93	0.83	Agreed
8	Open communication is enhanced when counsellors provide undivided attention to students.	2.91	0.82	Agreed	2.95	0.81	Agreed
9	Students feel comfortable sharing sensitive issues when counsellors listen without judgment.	2.86	0.85	Agreed	2.90	0.84	Agreed
10	Listening skills help counsellors create a safe space for honest dialogue with students.	2.87	0.83	Agreed	2.92	0.82	Agreed
11	Encouraging students to express themselves freely is supported by effective listening.	2.85	0.84	Agreed	2.89	0.83	Agreed
12	Active listening reduces communication barriers during counselling sessions.	2.90	0.81	Agreed	2.94	0.80	Agreed
Grand Total		2.88		Agreed	2.92		Agreed

Table 2 revealed the mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers on the extent to which encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The data indicate that the mean of male teachers for item 7 is (2.88) while the mean of female teachers is (2.93). Based on the criterion mean of 2.50, both male and female teachers agreed that counsellors' listening encourages students to speak openly about their problems. Similarly, for items 8 to 12, the mean ratings for male teachers ranged from (2.85) to (2.91),

while the mean ratings for female teachers ranged from (2.89) to (2.95). Based on the criterion mean of 2.50, both male and female teachers agreed that open communication is enhanced when counsellors provide undivided attention, listen without judgment, create a safe space for honest dialogue, encourage free expression, and use active listening to reduce communication barriers during counselling sessions. The cluster means are (2.88) for male teachers and (2.92) for female teachers which indicates that encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis which was agreed.

Research Question 3: How does understanding students’ problems enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 3 Mean and standard deviation analysis on how understanding students’ problems enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis

S/No	Items	Male Teachers n=80			Female Teachers n=276		
		Mean	SD	Remarks	Mean	SD	Remarks
13	Counsellors’ attentive listening helps in accurately identifying students’ issues.	2.92	0.82	Agreed	2.96	0.81	Agreed
14	Listening carefully allows counsellors to understand the root causes of students’ problems.	2.89	0.83	Agreed	2.93	0.82	Agreed
15	Students feel heard when counsellors paraphrase and reflect their concerns during sessions.	2.87	0.84	Agreed	2.91	0.83	Agreed
16	Listening skills help counsellors gather detailed information about student challenges.	2.88	0.81	Agreed	2.92	0.82	Agreed
17	Understanding students’ problems is enhanced when counsellors avoid interrupting them.	2.85	0.83	Agreed	2.90	0.82	Agreed
18	Counsellors who listen well can better tailor	2.90	0.80	Agreed	2.94	0.81	Agreed

S/No	Items	Male Teachers n=80			Female Teachers n=276		
	interventions to meet students' needs.						
Grand Total		2.89		Agreed	2.93		Agreed

Table 3 revealed the mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers on the extent to which understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The data indicate that the mean of male teachers for item 13 is (2.92) while the mean of female teachers is (2.96). Based on the criterion mean of 2.50, both male and female teachers agreed that counsellors' attentive listening helps in accurately identifying students' issues. Similarly, for items 14 to 18, the mean ratings for male teachers ranged from (2.85) to (2.90), while the mean ratings for female teachers ranged from (2.90) to (2.94). Based on the criterion mean of 2.50, both male and female teachers agreed that listening carefully to understand root causes, paraphrasing and reflecting concerns, gathering detailed information, avoiding interruptions, and tailoring interventions are important in understanding students' problems to enhance client-centered counselling services. The cluster means are (2.89) for male teachers and (2.93) for female teachers which indicates that understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis which was agreed.

Test of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on how building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 4: Summary of t-test on the difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on how building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Status	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male Teachers	80	2.87	0.83	354	-0.285	1.96	Failed to Reject H01
Female Teachers	276	2.90	0.83				

Table 7 reveals that the mean rating for male teachers was 2.87 (SD = 0.83), while the mean rating for female teachers was 2.90 (SD = 0.83). The t-calculated value was -0.285, with a degree of freedom (df) of 354, while the t-critical value at 0.05 level of significance was 1.96. Since the t-calculated value (-0.285) is less than the

t-critical value (1.96), the null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female teachers on how building trust enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on how encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 5: Summary of t-test on the difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on how encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Status	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male Teachers	80	2.88	0.83	354	-0.38	1.96	Failed to Reject H02
Female Teachers	276	2.92	0.82				

Table 5 reveals that the mean rating for male teachers was 2.88 (SD = 0.83), while the mean rating for female teachers was 2.92 (SD = 0.82). The t-calculated value was -0.38, with a degree of freedom (df) of 354, while the t-critical value at 0.05 level of significance was 1.96. Since the t-calculated value (-0.38) is less than the t-critical value (1.96), the null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female teachers on how encouraging open communication enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

3: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on how understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 6: Summary of t-test on the difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on how understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Status	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male Teachers	80	2.88	0.83	354	-0.42	1.96	Failed to Reject H03
Female Teachers	276	2.92	0.82				

Table 4.9 reveals that the mean rating for male teachers was 2.88 (SD = 0.83), while the mean rating for female teachers was 2.92 (SD = 0.82). The t-calculated value was -0.42, with a degree of freedom (df) of 354, while the t-critical value at

0.05 level of significance was 1.96. Since the t-calculated value (-0.42) is less than the t-critical value (1.96), the null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female teachers on how understanding students' problems enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

DISCUSSION

How Building Trust Enhances Client-Centered Counselling Services

The findings of the study showed that building trust plays a major role in enhancing client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The responses indicated that counsellors who paraphrase students' statements demonstrate true understanding of their feelings, maintain eye contact to strengthen trust, listen patiently without rushing, and allow students to fully express their thoughts. These practices help to create a safe and respectful environment where students feel valued and confident to share personal challenges without fear of judgment. This means that instead of superficial or hurried interactions, counsellors establish genuine relationships that encourage openness and mutual respect. The result agrees with the view of Rogers (1961), who explained that trust is a foundational condition in counselling that fosters a secure environment for clients to disclose sensitive information. It also supports the findings of Okafor (2020), who noted that trust reduces anxiety and resistance in students, enabling more effective counselling. In the same way, Eze (2019) pointed out that behaviours such as paraphrasing and attentive listening signal empathy and validation, which are essential to building trust in the counselling relationship. The implication of this finding is that counsellors in Port Harcourt Metropolis can significantly enhance counselling outcomes by adopting trust-building techniques, which encourage student participation and foster deeper engagement.

How Encouraging Open Communication Enhances Client-Centered Counselling Services

The findings of the study showed that encouraging open communication is instrumental in improving client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The responses indicated that counsellors who provide undivided attention, listen actively without judgment, and create safe spaces enable students to speak openly about their problems. This promotes honest dialogue and reduces communication barriers, allowing students to share sensitive issues more comfortably. This means that rather than superficial exchanges or closed interactions, counselling sessions become forums where students feel heard and respected. The result agrees with the view of Adams and Cox (2008), who explained that open communication fosters transparency and trust, which are critical for identifying students' true needs. It also supports the findings of Eze (2019), who noted that active listening and non-judgmental attitudes by counsellors promote emotional safety and encourage students to express themselves freely. Similarly, Okoye

(2020) emphasized that open communication in counselling leads to more accurate problem identification and better intervention outcomes. The implication of this finding is that counsellors should be trained to enhance their communication skills, ensuring they listen attentively and create supportive environments that facilitate open student expression.

How Understanding Students' Problems Enhances Client-Centered Counselling Services

The findings of the study showed that understanding students' problems significantly enhances client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The responses indicated that counsellors who listen attentively are better able to identify students' issues accurately, understand the root causes, paraphrase and reflect concerns during sessions, and avoid interrupting students. These practices help counsellors gather detailed information, enabling them to tailor interventions that address the specific needs of each student. This means that rather than making assumptions or offering generic advice, counsellors use active listening to comprehend the complexity of students' problems and provide targeted support. The result agrees with the view of Nwankwo (2021), who explained that careful listening and accurate problem identification are critical for effective counselling, as they form the basis for appropriate intervention strategies. It also supports the findings of Musa (2018), who noted that when counsellors avoid interrupting and reflect students' concerns, clients feel heard and validated, which strengthens the therapeutic relationship. In the same way, Okeke (2022) pointed out that detailed understanding of students' challenges allows counsellors to design more relevant and impactful programmes, leading to better student outcomes. The implication of this finding is that counsellors should emphasize deep listening and reflection skills in their training to enhance their ability to understand and address students' unique problems effectively.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the study, it was concluded that key counselling components such as building trust, encouraging open communication, understanding students' problems, enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis. These components collectively contribute to creating a supportive and trusting counselling environment that promotes students' willingness to share their concerns, facilitates accurate problem identification, and encourages active student participation in goal setting and problem solving.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance client-centered counselling services among public senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis:

1. School authorities and counselling stakeholders should organize regular training workshops to equip counsellors with advanced skills in building trust, empathetic listening, open communication, and empowerment techniques to improve counselling effectiveness.
2. The Ministry of Education and school management should develop and enforce policies that prioritize client-centered counselling approaches as an integral part of the secondary school system to ensure students receive adequate emotional and psychological support.

Schools should allocate sufficient resources to counselling departments, including private counselling spaces and teaching aids, to create conducive environments for confidential and effective counselling sessions.

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