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Perception of Secondary School Counsellors on Their Leadership Roles in the Education of Students with Special Needs in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The knowledge of whether secondary school counsellors envision themselves as leaders in the educational setting and the extent to which this perspective has been transformed to functional leadership practices is unclear. However, educators recognize the unique position occupied by guidance counsellors and the essential roles they play especially, in the education of persons with special needs. This study therefore, examined secondary schools counsellors' perceptions of their leadership roles in the education of persons with special needs. It also investigated if any difference exists in secondary school counsellors' perceptions of their leadership roles and some selected variables of age, gender, experience, or school status. The study adopted descriptive research design. The sample of the study comprised (40) (that is, thirty-four (34) females and six (6) males), professional secondary school counsellors, from 40 (that is, 30 public and 10 private) secondary schools who are also members of the Lagos State Chapter of the counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON). The respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique and purposive sampling. All respondents have some knowledge of special education. The respondents were purposively selected from four education districts of Lagos State out of six. Four hypotheses were formulated, while a self-developed questionnaire on counsellors' perception of their leadership roles was the main instrument for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using t-test. The results of the study indicated that respondents see themselves as leaders in the education sector irrespective of counsellors' age, gender, years of experience and school status (public or private). Based on the findings, recommendations were made which include that guidance counsellors should engage in functional leadership practices in order to positively impact achievement of all students especially those with special needs.

Keywords: Students with special needs, Guidance counsellor, Perception, Leadership, Secondary education

Introduction

Historically, modern education of persons with special needs began over two hundred years ago with the discovery of the “wild boy” in the woods by farmers in Southern France in 1799. Since this period, attempts to care and educate persons with special needs have moved from abandonment to segregation, then to normalization, mainstreaming, integration and finally to inclusion. These philosophies and practices represent major breakthroughs in the provision of educational services to persons with special needs. Similarly, many national and state governments have enacted legislations concerning implementation of educational services for persons with special needs. A few examples of such legislations are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 of the United States of America (DO-IT, University of Washington, 2015), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 of Ireland (Citizens Information Board, 2015), the Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) of the Republic of Ghana (Asante & Sasu, 2015), the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) and the Lagos State, Nigeria, law for the protection of Persons with Disabilities (Akinbola, 2014).

The most popular legislation in the field of Special Education, enacted by the United States of America, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) authorizes that individualized education programme be delivered to every infant, toddler, child, and student who has been identified as having a disability and who is in need of special education. This mandate is in line with the overarching purpose of special education, which is, ensuring that all individuals with disabilities achieve to their fullest potential so that as adults, they can attain full community presence by holding meaningful jobs and living independently (Smith, 2007).

To achieve this aim, the multidisciplinary team of professionals often works collaboratively, to assess and remediate academic, behavioural, psychological, social, and emotional deficits commonly exhibited by students with special needs. The guidance counsellor is certainly, an important multidisciplinary team member who ensures that students with special needs receive adequate appropriate education as

stipulated by IDEA (2004) law and in particular, the NPE (FRN, 2013). Based on this, this study examined the unique roles of guidance counsellors as educational leaders in our secondary schools.

Students with Special Needs

According to 211 LA County (2008) students with special needs are students with a variety of different disabilities, health and mental health conditions that require special intervention, services, or support. In their opinion, the definition of "special needs" is broad and includes health, mental health, developmental, and other kinds of conditions and diagnoses. Some examples include: autism, serious emotional and behavioural disturbances, mental retardation, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), epilepsy, cerebral palsy, feeding and eating disorders, tics, elimination disorders, learning disabilities, orthopedic, visual, speech or language impairments, other serious medical conditions, history of abuse or neglect, medical or genetic risk due to familial mental illness or parental substance abuse. Students with special needs also include those students who are "at-risk" for disabilities such as those who have a developmental delay. In addition, education of students with special needs involve individually planned, specialized, intensive, goal-directed, diagnostic, developmental, continuous, research-oriented and experimental instruction and services provided to diverse categories of special learners, which is aimed at meeting the special needs and requirements of the exceptional or special individuals (Smith, 2007, Mangal, 2007).

To adequately provide for the needs of these students, Mangal (2007) opined that educators should recognize that students with special needs have two main types of needs and problems. The first category of needs and problems as identified by Mangal are the physical and psychological feelings and needs generally felt by other students, while the second one are the needs and problems of special nature associated with their exceptionality. These may include need for awareness of one's specialty, need for coping with one's exceptionality, need for getting appropriate education, need for being independent in life functioning, need for the satisfaction of special learning capacities, need for proper

guidance and counselling, need for getting equal educational opportunities, need for special aids, equipment and assistive devices, and need for getting incentives and financial assistance.

A close examination of these needs and problems reveals that guidance counsellors have significant roles which they must play to ensure proper adjustment, development and progress in the life of students with special needs. This understanding has prompted this study. It is hoped that through this study, special educators, guidance counsellors, regular educators, policy makers as well as persons with special needs would understand the perceived leadership roles of secondary school counsellors particularly as it affects the education of students with special needs.

Guidance Counsellors and their Leadership Roles in Educational Settings

As posited by the American School Counsellor Association/Hatch and Bowers (2005), Dimmitt, Carey and Hatch (2007) guidance counsellors implement a data-driven, evidence-based comprehensive school counselling programme that promotes and enhances student achievement, career and college access, and personal and social competencies at the primary, middle (junior secondary), and high (senior secondary) school levels. In addition, Stone and Clark (2001) maintained that professional school counsellors are uniquely positioned to be educational leaders.

For instance, at the point of admission of new entrants, the counsellor organises orientation programme to enlighten students and their parents about school activities and procedures. Access to useful student data is a feature of school counsellor leadership. As the school year commences, guidance counsellors have the fulcrum of information flow regarding students and their performance in school. Together with few other school personnels like the principal, guidance counsellors have access to virtually all available data about students. Before the Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs) for students with special needs are developed, the guidance counsellor in collaboration with other members of the multidisciplinary team of professionals conducts

necessary assessments for these students. The counsellor also engages in advocacy and other collaborative activities to achieve the needed change in the lives of students with special needs. All these assume a certain degree of leadership. Going by the myriads of services rendered by school counsellor, it becomes necessary to conclude that leadership is central to the school counsellor's roles.

Besides, students with special needs may become victim of so many social, emotional, physical, mental and moral problems on account of their extreme deviations from the normal course and pattern of life (Mangal, 2007). For a counsellor to handle these peculiar needs and problems, he must visualize himself as part of the administrative team. He must endorse himself as a leader in the school system. He must engage in more operational leadership practices. The counsellor must be able to act wisely, properly and timely, penetrating through the executive and managerial hierarchies' common in schools. He should be able to guide the student with visual and hearing impairments to make use of assistive devices such as mobility cane and hearing aid.

Another area of counsellor practice that requires leadership emphasis is in the area of assisting students with special needs in their career selection and acquisition of necessary skills for employment, or independent life. School counsellors can facilitate infusion of career skills by consulting with regular and special teachers. This also requires effective leadership practices. In the area of accommodations, modifications and adaptations of curriculum and other school activities, counsellors must be encouraged to model the way as educational leaders. Thus, leadership is an essential skill for school counsellors working in the 21st century (American School Association [ASCA], 2005; House & Hayes, 2002).

Furthermore, the need for school counsellors to serve as leaders has also been recognized by other researchers in the field such as, Dollarhide, Smith, and Lemberger (2008). Among other things these scholars opined that school counsellors should engage in more operational leadership practices in order to: deliver more appropriate services to meet the needs of all students, promote their professional identity, and disambiguate their professional roles. Therefore, school

counsellors' leadership practices might influence the comprehensive, programmatic service delivery they provide to their students and stakeholders. In fact, leadership may be considered the foundation of other essential skills that guidance counsellors possess. Stone and Dahir (2006) suggested that effective school counsellor leadership should be considered as a professional "mindset", which has bearing on positive student outcomes. Therefore, helping school counsellors to understand the application of leadership to their work is key to their realizing new roles and transformed comprehensive programmes especially in the education of students with special needs.

Empirical Studies on School Counsellor Leadership Roles

In a qualitative study, Amatea and Clark (2005) examined the perceptions of administrators about the role of their school counsellors. The researchers identified four distinctive patterns of school counsellor role conceptualization: the innovative school leader, the collaborative case consultant, the responsive direct service provider, and the administrative team player. The majority, of participants (17 out of 26, approximately 65%) categorized their school counsellors as either case consultants or direct service providers, with these counsellors acting responsively to the needs of students, parents, and staff as they arose. The smallest percentage of administrators in the study--only 12% (3 out of 26)--viewed their school counsellors in the innovative school leader role, meaning they saw their school counsellors as essential in implementing whole-school or system-wide change. Although this study was qualitative, and therefore generalizing the findings was not a goal of the study, the study may be indicative of larger trends and may highlight an ongoing struggle for a clear, progressive professional school counsellor identity.

Besides, Ford and Nelson (2007) conducted a study to investigate school counsellors' perceptions of leadership, specifically their roles as educational leaders in their present school settings. Their study was a qualitative inquiry into a select number of Texas High School Counsellors with years of experience ranging from three years to thirty-two years. This collaborative study provided insight into counsellors' views of leadership. Their study results indicated that

respondents have the tools to be educational leaders. However, some of the tools are misunderstood, underutilized, unrecognized and/or used incorrectly.

The Leadership Practices Model

The theoretical model underlying this study is the Leadership Practices Model by Kouzes and Posner (2002). The choice of this model will enable the researcher to assess how school counsellors act as leaders in their jobs. Through their research on leadership in a variety of settings, including education, Kouzes and Posner (2002a) identified five primary practices of leaders: "Model the Way," "Inspire a Shared Vision," "Challenge the Process," "Enable Others to Act," and "Encourage the Heart." On face value, it seems that many school counsellors may identify well with "Enable Others to Act" and "Encourage the Heart." By contrast, because of a lack of intentional leadership training in school counselling and traditional counsellor education focusing on responsive skills, practitioners may be missing skills that fall under "Challenge the Process" (for instance, taking risks, seeking out new ideas) and "Inspire a Shared Vision" (for example, describing a bright future, compelling others toward change).

One certain fact is that the American School Counsellor Association/Hatch and Bowers (2005), as well as other scholars like Stone and Dahir, (2006, 2007) have noted that recent training materials for school counsellors especially in advanced countries have begun to address the need for school counsellor leadership. However, the extent to which guidance counsellor preparation and practice in Nigeria is geared towards equipping prospective counsellors with leadership skills is still in its infancy. Despite this challenge, it would be right to assert that to be an effective school counsellor, one must lead effectively. In order to achieve this, the counsellor must have clearly defined goals, good relationship, be a good role model, a school change agent and advocate and a motivator.

Statement of the Problem

Students with special needs possess unique; disabling and handicapping conditions or unusually high potentials which prevent them from benefitting from normal school and classroom arrangements and activities. Some important services offered by educators to assist these students obtain maximum educational benefits are guidance counselling services which could be academic, vocational, and/or social/personal. Also, an efficient guidance counsellor together with other school personnel is expected to be an advocate, a member of the multidisciplinary team for assessment of special needs students, a motivator, and a school change agent. However, no guidance counsellor can render these services effectively without modelling the way as an educational leader. Although researches have begun to examine some leadership variables in school counselling on the foreign scene, it is not clear whether these leadership behaviours are typically practised; or not practised, by professional guidance counsellors in Nigeria. Efforts is being made therefore, in this study, to learn more about school counsellors' leadership practices especially, as it affects the entire school climate and academic achievement for students with special needs.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined some secondary school counsellors' perceptions of their leadership roles in the education of students with special needs. It also investigated whether any difference exist in secondary school counsellors' perceptions of their leadership roles in the education of students with special needs using some selected variables of age, gender, experience, or school status.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study-at-0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

2. There is no significant difference between young and older secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.
3. There is no significant difference between public and private secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.
4. There is no significant difference between less experienced and more experienced secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design of survey type because it sought information on the secondary school counsellors' perceptions of their leadership roles in their various secondary schools.

Population

The population for this study was all guidance counsellors from secondary schools in Lagos State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study comprised (40) professional secondary school counsellors selected using a stratified random sampling technique and purposive sampling technique. Four (4) out of six (6) Education Boards in Lagos State namely, District I (Agege), District II (Ikeja), District III (Ikoyi), District VI (Oshodi) were selected. Thirty (30) public and ten (10) private secondary schools that have trained school counsellors were purposively selected. Thus, one guidance counsellor was selected from each school. The demographic data of the respondents show that out of the 40 respondents, thirty-four (34) were females while six (6) were males. Likewise, the years of experience as a school counsellor ranged from two (2) years to thirty-one (31) years. The age range of respondents was between twenty-four (24) and fifty-two (52) with the mean age being forty-one (41) years old. In addition, all respondents, have knowledge of special education, possess at least a bachelor's degree in guidance and counselling and were members of the

Lagos State Chapter of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON).

Instrument for the Study

The researcher made use of a self-designed questionnaire on practising secondary school counsellors' perception of their leadership roles in the education of students with special needs, titled "The Leadership Roles Questionnaire for Secondary School Counsellors" (LRQSSC). The questionnaire is a modified Likert scale made up of four options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The first section of the questionnaire is a Demographic status of the respondents. This demographic section consists of ten (10) items. The survey asks the participants about their personal demographics (that is, age, gender), their education and training experiences in school counselling (including whether they participated in the Counselling Association of Nigeria, (CASSON) activities, the school setting in which they worked, the status of their school (public or private) whether they hold administrative positions or not and their years of experience in school counselling.

This was followed by a fifteen-point item that focuses on various practices of leaders in the educational setting. The statement items seek to examine whether secondary school counsellors' perceptions of their role as educational leader in the light of the five primary practices of leaders identified by Kouzes and Posner (2002a). These leadership qualities demand the counsellor to actually Model the Way (MTW), Inspire a Shared Vision (ISV), Challenge the Process (CTP), Enable Others to Act (EOA), and Encourage the Heart (ETH).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire was given to experts in the field of psychometrics for purpose of scrutiny and to ensure face validity. These scholars screened out irrelevant items and replaced such with more appropriate items. Reliability of the instrument was tested on a small group comprising of twenty secondary school counsellors who were not

educational leader, with an average perception mean score of 52.83 while the female had an average perception mean score of 52.14. However, the t-test statistics computed revealed that the value of the t-calculated (0.327) was less than the value of the t. tabulated (2.02). The null hypothesis was therefore, confirmed. This means that male and female secondary school counsellors do not differ in their perceptions of guidance counsellors' role as educational leaders (Crit-t = 2.02, Cal. t = 0.327, df = 38, $P < 0.05$ level of significance).

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between young and older secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

Table 2: t-test Comparisons Showing Age Differences in Counsellors' Perception of their Role as Educational Leaders

Counsellors' Perception of Leadership Roles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	P
Young (Below 34 years old)	6	51.50	3.73	2.02	.421	38	0.05
Older (Above 35 years old)	34	52.38	4.29				

Table 2 showed that the value of the t-calculated (0.421) is less than the value of the t. tabulated (2.02). The null hypothesis was therefore, confirmed. This means that young and older secondary school guidance counsellors do not differ in their perceptions of guidance counsellors' role as educational leaders (Crit-t = 2.02, Cal.t = .421, df = 38, $P < 0.05$ level of significance).

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between public and private secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

part of the sample. A re-administration was conducted after two weeks. The data obtained was subjected to statistical analysis, and using a Cronbach Alpha formula, the correlation coefficient of 0.77 was obtained showing that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

Administration of Instrument

The researcher administered the questionnaires at one of the meetings of the Lagos State Chapter of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) (usually held every first Thursday of the month), at the University of Lagos. The researcher administered forty (40) questionnaires to the respondents. All the respondents completed the questionnaires and retrieval was done at the same time. Data generated were analyzed using t-test statistics.

Results

The t-test for independent means was calculated to determine whether there are any differences between secondary school counsellors' perceptions of their leadership roles in the education of students with special needs and some selected variables of age, gender, experience, or school status. These data are reported in Tables 1 – 4 below.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

Table 1: t-test Comparisons Showing Gender Differences in Counsellors' Perception of their Role as Educational Leaders

Counsellors' Perception of Leadership Roles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	P
Male	6	52.83	5.98	2.02	.327	38	0.05
Female	34	52.14	4.52				

Table 1 showed that male respondents obtained a slight higher rating on secondary school counsellors' perception of their role as

educational leader, with an average perception mean score of 52.83 while the female had an average perception mean score of 52.14. However, the t-test statistics computed revealed that the value of the t-calculated (0.327) was less than the value of the t. tabulated (2.02). The null hypothesis was therefore, confirmed. This means that male and female secondary school counsellors do not differ in their perceptions of guidance counsellors' role as educational leaders (Crit-t = 2.02, Cal. t = 0.327, df = 38, P < 0.05 level of significance).

Hypothesis Two

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Table 2: t-test Comparisons Showing Age Differences in Counsellors' Perception of their Role as Educational Leaders

Counsellors' Perception of Leadership Roles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	P
Young (Below 34 years old)	6	51.50	3.73	2.02	.421	38	0.05
Older (Above 35 years old)	34	52.38	4.29				

Table 2 showed that the value of the t-calculated (0.421) is less than the value of the t. tabulated (2.02). The null hypothesis was therefore, confirmed. This means that young and older secondary school guidance counsellors do not differ in their perceptions of guidance counsellors' role as educational leaders (Crit-t = 2.02, Cal.t = .421, df = 38, P < 0.05 level of significance).

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between public and private secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

Table 3: t-test Comparisons Showing Differences between Public and Private School Counsellors' Perception of their Role as Educational Leaders

Counsellors' Perception of Leadership Roles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	P
Public	30	51.47	4.68	2.02	1.89	38	0.05
Private	10	54.60	4.03				

The table above showed that there was no significant difference between guidance counsellors in public and private secondary schools in their perceptions of guidance counsellors' role as educational leaders. (Crit-t = 2.02, Cal. t = 1.892, df = 38, P < .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis was therefore, confirmed.

Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference between less experienced and more experienced secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs.

4: t-test Comparisons Showing Differences between Less Experienced and More Experienced School Counsellors' Perception of their Role as Educational Leaders

Counsellors' Perception of Leadership Roles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
Less experienced	11	52.18	3.57	2.02	.771	38	0.05
More Experienced	29	51.90	5.05				

Table 4 showed that there was no significant difference between guidance counsellors with fewer years of experience and those with more experience in school counselling in their perceptions of their roles as educational leaders (Crit-t = 2.02, Cal. t = .771, df = 38, P < 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis was therefore confirmed.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis that stated that there was no significant difference between male and female secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' role as educational leaders was confirmed. From the result obtained in this study it is clear that both male and female secondary school counsellors have high perception about their roles as educational leaders. Although there were no statistical differences between the perception of female guidance counsellors and male guidance counsellors, generally, respondents perceive that leadership is central to their profession. This finding is therefore in agreement with the finding of Ford and Nelson (2007) which provided insight into school counsellor's views of leadership. According to these researchers, school counsellors have what it takes to be educational leaders.

The second hypothesis that stated there was no significant difference between young and older secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' role as educational leaders was likewise confirmed. This suggests that age is not a factor in counsellors' perception of their role as educational leaders. As revealed by this study, whether a counsellor is less than thirty-four years old or he/ she is more than thirty-five years old, the point is that school counsellors perceive themselves as leaders in their various schools. The reason why this is so could stem from the kind of orientation that school counsellors who participated in this study received during their training in tertiary institutions. The fact is that all participants (age notwithstanding) are members of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON). This could also be a kind of advantage to participants for many reasons. For instance, during the CASSON, Lagos State Chapter monthly meetings, practical counselling cases presented by members of the association are discussed. Guidance counsellors in attendance brainstorm, probe, discuss, analyze, and evaluate such cases and arrive at reasonable suggestions and solutions to detected counselling problems based on what is obtainable in counselling theory and practice. Therefore, it can be concluded that when guidance counsellors join professional associations, subscribe to scholarly journals and attend seminars and

conferences they gain information and acquire additional expertise that help them to perform their duties in their various schools effectively.

The third hypothesis that stated there was no significant difference between public and private secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' role as educational leader was equally confirmed. This means that school status (public or private) of respondents does not determine the perception of school counsellors concerning their role as educational leaders. This finding seems peculiar to public and private schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. In Lagos State, and especially within the Metropolis, there is a lot of government presence in the public schools. Presently, it is no longer news to find educators from public schools in Lagos State participating in professional development trainings alongside with their counterparts from private schools. There is also availability of internet facilities and other assistive technologies in secondary schools in Lagos State. These new technologies help educators to acquaint themselves with new trends in the globe. In addition, the system of placing students in junior secondary schools in separate schools with their own administrators, counsellors and teachers, has given many educators the opportunity to practice leadership roles, counsellors inclusive, without inhibitions.

The fourth hypothesis which stated that there was no significant difference between less experienced and more experienced secondary school counsellors' perceptions of counsellors' role as educational leader was also confirmed. In other words, guidance counsellors' year of experience is not a determining factor when counsellors' perception of their roles as educational leaders is concerned. Moreover, the high mean score obtained by guidance counsellors (less experienced and more experienced alike) connotes that the opinions of all respondents are in consonance with the view of Stone and Clark (2001) that school counsellors are uniquely positioned to be educational leaders. Thus, a guidance counsellor who does not perceive himself or herself as a leader in his or her school may not only be ineffective but also non-transformational.

Educational Implications of the Study

This study has substantiated that guidance counsellors are uniquely positioned to act as leaders in their schools. Put together, male and female, young and older, public and private secondary school guidance counsellors, as well as less experienced and more experienced secondary school guidance counsellors, do not differ statistically in their perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles in the education of students with special needs. Interestingly, all guidance counsellors in this study indicated their high perceptions of counsellors' leadership roles. In other words, they agree that to succeed as a guidance counsellor in the school system, the individual must endorse himself or herself as a leader. He must act as a school change act, be an advocate, and a role model, and ensure that students with special needs maximize their potentials and acquire functional skills for independent living.

This study has also revealed that guidance counsellors' ability to practice leadership roles through promoting positive relationships, supporting student academics, recognizing the need for improvement, facilitating the change process, collaborating with regular and special educators, community leaders and parents, and utilizing current literature and research would earn such guidance counsellors high levels of efficiency. By so doing, all and sundry would get to identify with and support comprehensive guidance and counselling programmes in Nigerian schools.

Conclusion

The study concluded that irrespective of gender differences, age differences, school counsellors' years of experience, and school status (public or private), guidance counsellors perceive themselves as educational leaders, who could impact on the lives of students with special needs.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the study recommended that:

1. Guidance Counsellors should engage in functional leadership practices in order to positively impact achievement of all students especially those with special needs.
2. Guidance counselling training and professional development programmes should address the need for school counsellors' leadership roles, particularly in the education of students with special needs as obtainable in foreign (developed) countries.
3. Guidance Counsellors should be encouraged to join professional associations not only in counselling but also in the field of special education.
4. Guidance Counsellors in the regular secondary schools should acquaint themselves with special education programmes, so as to be of help to students with manifestation of learning disabilities and related disabilities.

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