Counselling Self-Efficacy and Professional Commitment: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence and Gender Identification

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Abstract- This study examined the predictive relationship between counselling, self-efficacy and commitment and the potential mediating effects of emotional intelligence and gender identification. Master's-level counselling interns and doctoral counselling students (N = 126) were surveyed to determine levels of counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, gender identification and counsellor commitment. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients revealed significant pairwise relationships between the 4 variables of interest. A multiple-mediator path analysis supported the hypotheses that counselling self-efficacy is a significant predictor of counsellor commitment. and that emotional intelligence is a mediator of that relationship, Results suggest that counselling self-efficacy may be an important variable in the development of key counsellor preparation outcomes and professional commitment.

Index Terms- Counselling, self-efficacy, Counsellor commitment, Emotional intelligence

I. INTRODUCTION

AT first glance, the understanding of a counsellor to a layperson is simply an advisory agent. However, from a professional perspective based on theoretical underpinnings, its vast descriptions (Adeyemo, 2002; Akinboye, 2002; Ugoji, 2009) bequeath the counsellor with an enormous role which only a properly trained, psychologically stable and morally conscious individual can undertake. The counsellor is able to satisfy unfulfilled nurturing needs by rescuing people with problems, as well as participating in intimate relationships while always maintaining control (Kottler, 1995).Through the integration of theory, research, and practice, sensitivity to multicultural issues and with a broad range of practices, the counsellor helps people improve their well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises, and increase their ability with respect to living functioning lives.

Hence, in counselling training programmes, pre-service counsellors are passionately trained consumers of life (Kotler, 1995). They are inspired to become knowledgeable generalist, renaissance scholars and devourers of truth in any palatable form. They are not restricted to their learning text but opportune to broaden their minds. In a conservatively prudent and conscious approach, they are expected to read literature, history, anthropology, sociology, biology, biochemistry, education, psychology, philosophy all in a beneficent model that would aid the unfolding of the abstract and mystery called the human mind. Hence, counselling programme is about the most challenging emotional experience a student can undertake with strict intense academic and clinical pressures that has to be contained and exceeded.

While coordinating their self in a full optimally functioning model in response to client(s), counsellors also systematically deal with varied spontaneous reactions with patent skills and deep commitment. The counsellors in every session must orchestrate and continuously improvise multiple cognitive, social and behavioural sub skills to manage ever-changing circumstances in the session. Initiation and regulation of counselling actions are partly governed by judgments of operative capabilities. Moreso, Counsellors-in-training are expected to learn new ways of relating to others that often run counter to social norms (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

For example, rather than telling a client that everything will be ok, they are required to sit with a clients emotions. Instead of knowing the right answer, they are required to get comfortable with ambiguity. In place of smiling in acquiescence, they are challenged to be genuine and at the same time, non-judgmental. Moreover, the academic skills that helped counsellors-in-training succeed academically in the past do not necessarily translate into the ability to succeed in the interpersonal aspects of counselling. Considering the crucial role played by counsellors, the perception of efficaciousness and commitment to conduct counselling is an important component of understanding how counsellors, particularly pre-service counsellors subjectively construct their counselling and training experiences and subsequently develop into competent counselling professionals.

Understanding the import of counsellor self-efficacy theory and specifically its application is important for counsellor educators and researchers, because self-efficacy has been demonstrated to play a central role in counsellor trainees development (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998) and training initiatives (Larson, Clark, Wesely, Koraleski, Daniels, & Smith, 1999). Counsellor self-efficacy has been the focus of many researches in the past couple of decades. It is defined as ones beliefs or judgments about his or her capabilities to effectively counsel a client in the near future (Larson & Daniels, 1998). The

concept describes the degree to which a counsellor considers self as capable of counselling activities. Lent, Hill, and Hoffman (2003) conceptualized counselling self-efficacy as encompassing three broad sub-domains of perceived ability to: perform basic helping skills; manage session tasks, and; negotiate challenging counselling situations and presenting issues.

This corresponds with theoretical position that counsellor self-efficacy is a primary mechanism between simply knowing how to counsel and actually executing effective counselling actions (Larson, 1998). Studies abound indicating that higher counselling self-efficacy is related to perseverance in the face of challenging counselling tasks and an increased ability to receive and incorporate evaluative feedback (Adeyemo & Agokei, 2010; Larson & Daniels, 1998) . Hence, based on the strong positive relationship between counselling self-efficacy and counselling outcomes and the impact increased self-efficacy may have on reducing anxiety among pre-service counsellors, researchers have asserted that cultivating self-efficacy in counsellors needs to be a primary objective of counsellor training programmes (Bischoff, 1997; Duryee, Brymer, & Gold, 1996). In this light, counsellor educators are ethically charged with ensuring that new counsellors in the field are competent to meet standard set (American Counselling Association, 2005).

Unfortunately, counsellor self-efficacy of pre-service counsellors is greatly hindered by several factors with their attendant grave consequences to the society. One major factor is in the perception and commitment of pre-service counsellors to the training programme and profession. Majority of students are unfortunately relegated to the counsellor programmes because of their poor performance in other disciplines of their choice. Selection into the university could be pragmatic: grades or test scores as in the case of UTME (Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination) and post-UTME could prevent students from moving into programmes of their choice. Some others engage in the course to avoid perceived excessive competitiveness, commitment and overwhelming nature of other disciplines. In addition, others undertake the course for the sake of acquiring university education. To these, counselling seems a veritable alternative. Inadvertently, their perceptions and commitment to training ebb low as the years go by. This is because since the discipline does not depict their choices originally valued, the fundamental understanding of the basic concepts, constructs, theoretical underpinnings, approaches and applications of counselling is unclear to them. Unfortunately, it has been reported that a self-perceived or actual deficit in these areas may lead to lower counselling self-efficacy among pre-service counsellors (Al-Darmaki, 2004; Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Larson & Daniels, 1998).

Emotional intelligence is the mediating variable in this study. This is not far-fetched from the fact that emotional intelligence plays a critical role in attaining success in most endeavours. For instance, research findings indicate that emotional intelligence skills are important and perhaps critical factors of students achievement, retention, and personal health (Nelson & Low, 2005; Potter, 2005; Elkins & Low, 2004; Williams, 2004). These plethora of studies argue for the potency of emotional intelligence in measures of success. Extensive interdisciplinary research indicates that emotional intelligence and related non-traditional measures of human performance may be as

or more predictive of academic and career success than IQ or other tested measures of scholastic aptitude and achievement (Nelson & Low, 2003; Low & Nelson, 2005). Further, Adeyemo and Agokei (2009) report emotional intelligence to be an effective moderator in the linkage between achievement motivation training and performance of secondary school students. In addition, Aremu and Akpochafor (2007) find emotional intelligence as the most causal variable that influenced teaching self-efficacy of career- frustrated teachers. These findings provide a compelling case for including emotional skill development in academic and student services programmes in schools and colleges as well as in this study.

With respect to the study of gender and commitment, some ambiguity has occurred because of the manner in which this subject has been studied. Gender, as a topic in organizational commitment literature, has been approached from both the gender-model and the job- model (Aven, Parker, & McEvoy, 1993). The gender approach to the study of women and commitment was described as one where the basic belief was that, "women accept family roles as a chief source of their identity and fulfillment, leading to a different orientation to work for men, for whom work is paramount" (Loscocco, 1990). However, the implications of gender within counselling have been an integral part of research studies (Gold & Hawley, 2001; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). Gender has been described as a cultural term that emphasizes forms of characteristics ascribe to people because of their sex, which include ways they believe people behave, based on cultural expectations of what is male and female. For Constantine (2000), gender is a construct that is developed through the socialization of the cultural attributes, which consists of behaviours and characteristics that are associated with the male and female biological sex. These cultural attributes, behaviours and characteristics are better explained as feminine and masculine. To this, Gold and Hawley (2001) found that the effects of socialization may interfere with the mandate directed to counsellor education students to incorporate gender sensitive practices. Their study suggests counsellor education programs reinforce their commitment towards teaching gender sensitive counselling.

In summary, becoming a counsellor is an intellectually and emotionally challenging task (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003) which could breed anxiety. This anxiety, in turn, can lead to impaired clinical judgment and performance (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Urbani, Smith, Maddux, Smaby, Torres-Rivera, & Crews, 2002). Larson (1998) suggests that training programs grounded in self-efficacy theory hold promise for addressing these issues as well as cultivating counsellors who can successfully meet the challenges of the profession. Hence as efficacy and commitment among other counselling attributes and skills are vital to the outcome of counselling sessions, there is a great need to pay close attention to models that describe how best to train potential counsellors particularly pre-service counsellors.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this exploratory study was to address an important gap in the counsellor education literature by investigating the relationships between counselling self-efficacy, counselling commitment gender and emotional intelligence in counsellors-in-training. The researchers examined a path model that hypothesized a predictive relationship between counselling

self-efficacy, counselling commitment gender and emotional intelligence.

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were tested in the study.

1. There will be no significant correlations among counselling self-efficacy, counselling commitment gender and emotional intelligence
2. There will be no significant predictive effect of counselling self efficacy on counselling commitment when gender and emotional intelligence is entered in the model as mediator.

IV. METHOD

Research Design

The ex-post facto design was adopted in this study. This approach does not involve manipulation of any of the variables in the study. They are studied as they currently exist in the repertoire of the participants.

Participants

Master's-level counselling interns and doctoral students were recruited as participants in his study

Participants were recruited by contacting counsellor educators who work with master's-level interns and doctoral students and obtaining their agreement to distribute instrument packets at the end of class or supervision. A total of 126 participants were selected comprising of 54 doctoral students and 72 Master's-level counselling interns. In addition, 84 (66.7%) participants were female, and 42(33.3%) were male. The average age was 33.72 years (SD = 11.88).

Instruments

The Counsellor Commitment Scale: The scale is an adapted version of the career commitment scale developed and validated by Carson and Bedeian (1994), based on the conceptualization and definition of career commitment as ones motivation to work in a chosen vocation. The scale consists of twelve (12) items designed in a 5-point likert format. Increasing scores implies high counselling commitment while decreasing scores implies the converse. The scale has reported an internal consistency of 0.76 and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 using a two-week test-re-test procedure.

The Counsellor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES): The scale is a 41 item self-report measure of counselling self-efficacy developed by Lent et al. (2003). It consists of a 10- point likert-type scale in which respondents rate their confidence from 0 (no confidence at all) to 9 (complete competence). The CASES has been reported to have a high reliability with a Chronbachs alpha of 0.97 (Lent et al., 2003). A pilot test with pre-service counsellors from a university other than those in this study produced a scale alpha of 0.62.

Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale: Wong and Law (2002) developed the measure based on summary of a perspective of Emotional intelligence in the literature, which consists of four domains. These domains form the four sub-scales

of the measure. Each sub-scale consists of four items. The items on the measure are self-rated on a 5- point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). The ranges of coefficient alphas for the scale reported in various studies in Wong and Laws article were between 0.71 and 0.93. After subjecting the test to a split half reliability test it has reported a coefficient alpha of .75 and a standardize item alpha of .73.

Bems Sex Role Inventory: Bems Sex Role Inventory (1974) helped to determine the gender-stereotype. Cronbach alpha score of 0.88 for masculinity and 0.83 for femininity were obtained by Bem. A median split method was used to divide respondents into one of four gender-role orientation categories: masculine, androgynous, feminine and undifferentiated on the scale. The mean masculinity and femininity scores obtained were 4.43 and 4.02 respectively. Respondents with a masculinity score above 4.43 and a femininity score above 4.02 were categorized as androgynous (N= D 45). Respondents with a masculinity score above 4.43 and a femininity score below 4.02 were categorized as masculine (N= D 56). Respondents with a masculinity score below 4.43 and a femininity score above 4.02 were categorized as feminine (N= D 62). Respondents with a masculinity score below 4.43 and a femininity score below 4.02 were categorized as undifferentiated (N= D 44). A Cronbach alpha of 0.72 for the feminity and 0.75 for the masculinity was obtained in order to verify the suitability of the scale by the researcher after a pilot study was carried out.

Procedure

The researcher personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaires from the participants. Permissions were obtained from significant authorities to facilitate the process. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary, and no incentives were offered. Participants were adequately informed of confidentiality and the need to be precise and truthful in filling the questionnaire. The questionnaires were then filled and returned by the participants after adequate understanding.

V. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the relationship among the variables investigated. Path analysis was also used to identify the total effect, direct and indirect effects of independent variables on the dependent variable. Path analysis is a straight-forward extension of multiple regressions. Its aim is to provide estimates of the magnitude and significance of hypothesised causal connections between sets of variables. It is also a method of studying direct and indirect effects of variables taken as causes on variables taken as effects.

VI. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations between the variables. As demonstrated in the table, the mean scores for counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, gender and counselling commitment ; 142.8, 35.41, 4.39 and 42.255 respectively. The corresponding standard deviations for

the four variables are; 11.2, 9.55, 3.7 and 10.6. Significant relationships were found between and among all the variables with the strongest being between counselling self-efficacy and commitment (r =.47, p<0.5) and counselling commitment and emotional intelligence (r =.42, p<0.5).

The model hypothesized that counselling self-efficacy would be a significant predictor of counselling commitment when gender and emotional intelligence were entered in the model as mediators. Table 2 presents the results of the path analysis. Counselling self-efficacy, as measured by the CASES, significantly predicted emotional intelligence ($a2$ path) at $\beta = .58$ and accounted for 34% of the variance in mean scores (adjusted $R2 = .34$, $t = 7.88$, $p < .05$). CASES scores also significantly predicted gender,($a1$ path) at $\beta = .33$ and accounted for 11% of the variance in gender mean scores (adjusted $R2 = .11$, $t = 3.11$, $p < .05$). As hypothesized, when entered into the model as the sole predictor, CASES mean scores significantly predicted Counselling commitment (c path) at $\beta = .44$ and accounted for 19% of the variance in CASES mean scores (adjusted $R2 = .19$, $t = 4.71$, $p < .05$).

To test for mediation, the mean scores were entered on the CASES, the EI, and the gender into a regression model to predict counselling commitment scores. The resulting $c1$ path was not significant at $\beta = .07$ ($t = 0.35$, $p >.05$), demonstrating full mediation of the relationship between CASES mean scores and Counselling commitment mean scores by EI mean scores and the gender (Baron & Kenny. 1986). The adjusted $R2$ of this full model was .44.suggesting that CASES, the EI mean scores, and the gender account for 44% of the variance in counselling commitment mean scores ($F = 12.11$, $p < .05$). An examination of the direct and indirect effects of the proposed mediators revealed that emotional intelligence was a statistically significant mediator but gender was not. According to Per Baron and Kenny's (1986) requirements for mediation, emotional intelligence was a statistically significant predictor of the CASES (b1 path) when entered with CASES mean scores and gender into the regression model ($\beta = .64$, $t = 7.81$, $p < .05$). Gender, on the other hand, did not have a statistically significant direct effect on counselling commitment mean scores ($b2$ path: $\beta = .08$, $t = 0.93$, $p > .05$).

Table 1
Mean, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between Variables

	N	X	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Counselling commitment	126	42.25	10.6	1.000			
2. Counselling *self-efficacy*	126	142.8	11.2	.47**	1.000		
3. Emotional intelligence	126	35.41	9.55	42**	.31**	1.000	
4. Gender	126	4.39	3.7	.12*	.17*	.21	1.000

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2
Path Analysis of relationship between Counselling self efficacy Emotional intelligence, Gender and Counselling commitment

Variables	β	Adj R^2	SE	t	Mediation
Direct Effect of Counselling self efficacy to mediators (a paths)					
Emotional intelligence	.58	.34	.08	7.88**	
Gender	.33	.11	.08	3.11**	
Direct Effect of Mediators on Counselling Commitment (b paths)					
Emotional intelligence	.64	.44	.17	7.81**	Yes
Gender	.08	.44	.11	0.93	No
Total Effect of Counselling self-Efficacy on commitment (c path)					
Counselling Self-Efficacy	.44	.19	.19	4.71**	
Direct Effect of counselling Self-Efficacy on commitment (c¹ path)					
Counselling Self-Efficacy	.07	.44	.22	0.35	

$F(3, 122) = 12.11$, $p < .05$
** Significant at $p <. .05$

VII. DISCUSSION

A preliminary examination of the correlations between the four variables of interest for counselling self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, gender and counselling commitment was conducted before examining the full path model. As hypothesized, all four variables in the study were significantly related to each other. This can not be divorced from the fact that prior investigations indicates that emotional intelligence and self-efficacy have been found to be positively related (Adeyemo & Agokei, 2009; Nelson and Low, 2003; Low & Nelson, 2005; Aremu & Akpochafor, (2007). These studies suggest that counsellor training designed to increase the ability to identify personal emotions, use emotions for problem solving, and communicate emotions to another are effective in increasing counsellor self-efficacy.

A path analysis was conducted to examine more explicitly the predictive relationships and the direct and indirect effects of the predictor variables on counselling commitment. The result provides evidence that a sizable portion of the variance in counselling commitment (44%) can be explained by a counsellor's ability to be efficacious, emotionally intelligent and ones gender. As hypothesized, emotional intelligence was found to be a mediator of the relationship between counselling self efficacy and commitment. Counselling self efficacy accounted for 34% of the variance in emotional intelligence in the total sample. This suggests that those students who are efficacious about counselling experiences also are more emotionally intelligent, able to strategically control their emotions during counselling related activities and not get distracted or lost in their own inner dialogue. Prior studies (Bentley, 2007; Martin et al., 2004; Cherniss, 2000) lend credence to the current finding.

Emotional intelligence is an ability to recognize one's own feeling and those of others, for motivating self as well as one's relationship with others. Laabs' (1999) concludes that teachers who are more aware of how students feel in the classroom are better able to design a learning environment that suits students and better able to guide them towards success. Studies (e.g. Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2004) have shown that the acquisition of emotional intelligence skills can significantly contribute to positive thinking in students and increase their ability to concentrate for a long time. According to Caruso, Mayer and Salovey (2002), emotional intelligence skills and knowledge can be developed and learned and it matters most in times of change. Therefore, the acquisition of efficaciousness by the participants could have served as strong buffer for self-management of emotions and enabled them to be aware of their emotions, cope with strong feelings and not be overwhelmed.

The study demonstrated evidence of a significant predictive relationship between counselling self efficacy and gender in the total sample. Counselling self efficacy accounted for 7% of the variance in gender. Although the amount of variance predicted by counselling self efficacy in the total sample was small, the findings were consistent with previous research and theory on gender development in counsellors. For instance, Dupuy, Ritchie, and Cook (1994), acknowledge the importance of gender-related differences and their implications for professional counselling. They reveal that counsellor education programs should increasingly emphasize sensitivity training in regards to the gender of a counsellor and its implications for clients.

However, an unexpected finding was the non-significant predictive weight of gender on counsellor commitment. This finding appears contrary to existing theory suggesting that gender would be related to counsellor commitment (Drew & Emerek 1998; Greenhaus & Parasuraman 1999; Stockman et al. 1995; Veenis 1998). It is pertinent to note that gender exerts considerable influence over motives to teach (includes counselling) considering its educational centeredness and focus. Often, teaching is regarded as undemanding, feminine and compatible with domesticity, hence, females are encouraged into this profession. The daily work schedules appear convenient, and the holidays are long, allowing more time with their children. Hence, most women become counsellors because of a sense of job compatibility, less work demand seems much easier a schedule. Thus, counsellor commitment for women is mainly centred on giving, learning and helping. For men, counsellor commitment involves a focus on research and a commitment based on reciprocity. Therefore, the manner in which counselling students respond in the counselling session may differ from how they respond to people in general.

VIII. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Although commitment may be only one of the many important outcomes in counselling, it is widely recognized as an important aspect of counsellor behaviour, quality, and performance and is one that is expected to be directly affected by counsellor professionalization. It should be noted that commitment level of counsellors to their profession, students, and institutions increases when they achieve something through their efforts. Commitment is the emotional reaction towards education, therefore, commitment is the investment of counsellors in their profession. The results provide evidence that a sizable portion of the variance in counselling commitment can be explained by a students ability to integrate personal, environmental, behavioural actions and being emotionally intelligent in everyday life and during counselling sessions.

Based on the impact of counsellor self-efficacy and emotional intelligence on counselling outcomes, it is imperative that counsellor education programmes provide learning experiences that cultivate these skills. Hence, the results have implications for counsellors in terms of potential counsellor-training admissions, counsellor education, and counselling practice. Therefore, the study provides a significant contribution to literature and knowledge particularly to disciplines and profession of personality development and counselling psychology. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence significantly mediated the development of counselling efficacy and commitment observed in this study. Emotional Intelligence has been reported to have positive influence on work performance and academic success (Adeyemo, 2007; Adeyemo & Agokei, 2009; Adeyemo, Onongha & Agokei, 2010,). Trainees with high level of emotional intelligence have been found to have significant measure of counsellor efficacy. Therefore, providing and encouraging elementary training in emotional intelligence is vital to enhancing counselling efficacy and commitment of counsellor trainees.

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