

# The Professional Development of School Counsellors and its Influence on their Practice in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Cameroon

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## Abstract:

### Purpose

The purpose of this research was to examine the professional development of school counsellors and its influence on their practice in selected public secondary schools in Cameroon. The study aimed at examining the effects of counsellors' professional development on practice.

### Materials and Methods

The concurrent nested mixed-method research design was used. Quantitative data was collected through descriptive survey with the aid of a questionnaire while qualitative data was collected using an interview guide. A sample of 249 randomly selected school counsellors were recruited from secondary schools in Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions of Cameroon.

### Findings

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools; frequency counts, graphs, percentages and the Pearson test and regression analysis was used to test hypotheses. Thematic analysis with the aid of themes and quotations was used for qualitative data. Findings showed a significant positive but moderate influence on practice (R-value=0.339\*\*, P-value=0.000<0.05). Implications are that the quality of training being offered to counsellors be intensified and improved.

### Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy

It was recommended that school counsellors be trained to be multi-skilled, the training be intensified with emphasis on practicum; appropriate and adequate programmes are organized and appropriately delivered by those who master the content at divisional and regional levels for counsellors to upgrade their skills.

**Keywords:** Professional Development, School Counsellors, Training, Practice, Secondary Schools, Mezam, Mfoundi Divisions



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## Introduction

School counsellors have an enormous impact on student achievement and attainment. From the courses students take to the goals they set and paths they pursue, school counsellors are powerful forces in their schools and in the lives of students (Education Trust, 2007). Guidance and counselling is an important educational tool in shaping the orientation in a child from negative ideas that is planted in the child by his/her peers. Hence the need for the school counsellors to assist the child in molding their future through counselling. The school counsellor is seen as a role model and highly respected by students. The counsellors by their training are expected to be friends with the school child, listen to the child's complains, short comings and proffer guidance to the child in a quest of molding the child in the right part to take in their life pursuit (Rayees and Najmha, 2021). They further opine that school counsellor education programmes are designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills to become competent professional school counsellors. In this light there is a need for school counsellor training programmes which will equip school counsellors and school counselling students with the skills and competencies needed to practice effectively (McEachern, 2003). In the school counselling profession, competence includes the ability to provide a variety of counselling-related tasks and activities including one-on-one counselling, group counselling and academic support often through the facilitation of counselling services (ASCA, 2017).

According to Kozlowski and Huss (2013), school counsellors have unique, specialized training needs that differ from those of clinical mental health counsellors. They are licensed by state educational agencies. They must be ready to function in a variety of roles to support all students' academic, career, and personal/social development (Studer and Oberman, 2006). They further postulated that, school counsellors work in complex educational systems, have large case loads, and manage school counselling programmes. Their jobs encompass much more than individual and group counselling and the traditional training models are not keeping up with the needs of today's school counsellors (Studer and Oberman, 2006). School counsellors need clarification of their unique role on a school campus while learning how to manage an overwhelming number of referrals and student needs, how to manage the influences of teachers, how to maintain their own skills apart from teachers, how to implement counselling programmes as well as how to integrate themselves and the counselling programmes into the school system (ASCA, 2016; Kozlowski and Huss, 2013). In fact the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA, 2016) states that school counsellors should possess proficient skills in programme development, programme leadership, collaborative practices, as well as appropriate referral procedures.

In order to ensure that school counsellors are well-trained to meet the needs of students, various organizations have established standards and guidelines such as; the American School Counsellors' Association (ASCA), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programmes (CACREP).

According to Walley (2009), school counsellor education programmes are expected to offer preparation in certain areas of knowledge and skills that encompass a range of issues faced by students today. To him the primary means through which school counsellors obtain (at least minimum) professional knowledge and skills is through completion of a school counsellor preparation programme. The ASCA School Counsellor Competencies outline the knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes that ensure school counsellors are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the profession and the needs of students (ASCA, 2012). Brott (2006) opines that it is of critical importance that counsellors know what is needed from them and their professional abilities.

Lee (2005) cited in Tantoh (2023) observed that present day school counsellors have post training needs due to the fact that schools are often forced to confront a number of significant issues that

affect the psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual development of their students. Therefore, school counsellor training must adequately prepare future practitioners to meet the unique needs of today's school children. SavitzRomer (2012) states that in the face of these increasing inequities in schools, professional development (PD) for school counsellors is important. According to the ASCA (2016), PD for high school counsellors is mandatory to meet the 5-year renewal requirement as a certified counsellor. Also, counsellors are mandated to complete 200 hours of PD every 5 years from either of the following entities: workshops, staff development, institutes, seminars, or conferences. Despite these provisions it seems school counsellors still perform their duties with some difficulties (SavitzRomer, 2012). This study seeks to examine the professional development of school counsellors and its influence on practice.

## **Background**

According to Ogbodo (2020), the genesis of guidance and counselling can be traced back to the origin of man in society. She further opines that long ago, man has always sought guidance from persons he/she feels is in a position to help. Through traditional (informational) ways, the contribution of religious leaders, elders, priests, Imams, friends and well-wishers towards meeting the guidance needs of people in their societies have been highly eventful and impactful. She however states that, modern guidance and counselling began in the United States of America (USA) under Frank Parsons in 1908, and since then it has spread to various Countries and Continents. Guidance and counselling have grown worldwide acquiring a steady reputation as it meets the educational, vocational and personal/social needs of various recipient countries. In addition, he further states that factors such as; expansion of professionalization and specialization, the Philanthropic and Humanitarianism Movement, religion, the need for mental hygiene, increased student number in American schools and social change have helped in the growth of the counselling profession.

In relation to the history of the training and practice of counselling in schools, school counselling began as vocational guidance in the early 1900s (Gysbers, 2010). It was established in schools as a position occupied by administrators and teachers. No organizational structure was provided other than a list of duties. In the 1920s school counselling began to change, shaped by the mental hygiene, psychometric and child study movements. As a result, a more clinically oriented approach to school counselling emerged. He further states that this signaled a shift away from economic issues to psychological issues with an emphasis on counselling for personal adjustment.

Furthermore, Gysbers (2010) states that the development and implementation of school counselling programmes across the country (USA) grew in the first decade of the 21st century. To him, this growth was stimulated by the publication of the ASCA National Model in 2003 and its adoption by many states and school districts. A second edition was published in 2005, followed by a third edition in 2013 and the fourth edition in 2019.

## **The Growth of School Counselling in Cameroon**

According to Agbor (2016), the Cameroon government through Law No.98/004 of April 1998 instituted guidance and counselling services in secondary schools to add to the existing efforts aimed at enabling students attain their educational goals. According to this law, educational counseling and psychological activities shall be carried out during the child's period of schooling, at all levels of education. To make this law more effective and practical the government further promulgated a handbook called the Guidance Counsellor's terms of reference (cahier de charge). This book carries the syllabus for guidance and counselling lessons in the secondary school, which is further divided into weeks and terms with respect to the various classes. According to section 29 of the Guidance Counsellor's terms of reference educational counselling and psychological activities shall be carried out during the child's period of schooling at all levels of education. In this book we find interesting lessons like:

- Help to improve Academic performance
- Techniques of learning subjects taught
- Assistance to the academic performance of students
- Fields of studies and job opportunities etc, that directly informs the students on how to improve on their performance and attain success. The principal objective of this effort, is to enable individual students acquire academic achievement (Agbor, 2016).

School counselling services are offered as part of a comprehensive and developmental programme, to address the development of academic/educational, career, personal/social skills and competencies. Based on this importance, school counseling is offered to every student, as well as school personnel, families, and the community at large. The programme's services are aligned with the overall educational mission to initiate academic achievement in this milieu. Counselling is offered by trained counsellors from the Higher Teacher Training colleges (ENS) and Higher Technical Teacher Training Colleges (ENSET). School counsellors develop a programme plan based on the assessment of school improvement and needs-based data; they then coordinate, deliver, evaluate, and revise their programme on a regular basis. The programme also is shared with all stakeholders in the school and community.

Agbor (2016) further opines that the goal of the comprehensive program is to provide the most comprehensive opportunities possible to benefit every student, so as to enable them attain their academic objective which principally is success. Comprehensive programs employ strategies to enhance academics, provide career awareness, develop employment readiness, encourage self-awareness, foster inter personal communication skills, and impart life success skills for all students uses (Savage, 2004). Which are critical components of every student's school experience. This comprehensive school counseling program follows five primary steps: utilizes needs and school data to identify critical and important needs; implements clear assessments and purposeful program to address identified needs; aligns with educational Standards and National Model and district goals; evaluates progress of efforts; and identifies and communicates benefits to students and stakeholders (Agbor, 2016). These steps as well as the coordination of services are valuable to students and the school community, because the efforts make a difference in the lives of all students by maintaining a comfortable and structured learning environment. By determining ways in which students will acquire the competencies for appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors, will assist them become productive members of school, family and society (Agbor, 2016).

### **School Counsellors Training**

Gibson and Mitchell (2008) define counsellor training as a license or certificate offered to an individual to perform a unique and needed service to fellow human beings after undertaking courses in counselling. According to them, professional school counsellors must be fully trained and qualified to meet the needs of the client population they are designated to serve. They further state that school counsellors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counselling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counselling programme that promotes and enhances student success.

In addition, Gibson and Mitchell (2008) opine that school counsellors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high, high schools and universities; in district supervisory positions; and counsellor education positions. They recommend that school divisions should ensure that persons fulfilling the role of counsellor are adequately trained and should have completed a programme in counselling, including supervised practice in guidance and counselling. Once trained, the counsellors should then employ their knowledge, skills and understanding to draw up

a procedure that is ample enough to include and cater for the various needs of individual pupils/students within the school framework.

Brott (2006) opines that the training of school counsellors should emphasize both programme development and outcomes. In addition Brott (2006) is of the opinion that it is imperative for counsellor educators to structure the professional identity development of counsellors in training through guided learning experiences. School counsellors in training should become familiar with methods to implement comprehensive school counselling programmes (Kozlowski and Huss, 2013). Two ways trainees traditionally become familiar with implementing counselling programs are in practicum and internship experiences. What is problematic about practicum and internship experiences for school counsellor trainees is that counsellor educators typically attribute more importance to concepts that fit within traditional training models, such as individual and group counselling, than they do to concepts outside the traditional counsellor training framework (Kozlowski, 2013).

To further expatiate, McEachern (2003) opined that the mission of graduate counsellor education programmes is to train students to be effective and competent counsellors. To him, school counsellor education programs are expected to offer preparation in certain areas of knowledge and skills that encompass a range of issues faced by students today. In order to ensure that school counsellors are well-trained to meet the needs of students, various organizations have established standards and guidelines. The views of these organizations regarding the training of school counsellors are discussed below:

### **The Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programmes (CACREP) and Counsellors Training**

CACREP advocates for training model which is developmental in nature, has a guidance/career component, highlights attention to individual differences within student populations (that is, race/ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status) and acknowledges the importance of individual and group counselling competence, consultation, and program development and evaluation (Steward et al., 2008).

According to CACREP (2009) standards for school counsellors focus on eight areas: foundations, counselling, prevention and intervention, diversity and advocacy, assessment, research and evaluation, academic development, collaboration and consultation and leadership. All of which, are important when training professional school counsellors (PSCs) to work in a school environment. However, CACREP Standards expect that PSC's should: Demonstrate self awareness, sensitivity to others, and the skills needed to relate to diverse individuals, groups, and classrooms (CACREP, 2009); provide individual and group counselling and classroom guidance to promote the academic, career, and personal/social development of students; understand curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies, and differentiated instructional strategies for teaching, counselling, and guidance-related material; conduct programs designed to enhance student academic development; implement differentiated instructional strategies that draw on subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge and skills to promote student achievement; understand the school counsellor's role in student assistance programmes, school leadership, curriculum, and advisory meetings; plan and present school-counselling-related educational programmes for use with parents and teachers (for example parent education programmes, materials used in classroom guidance and advisor/advisee programmes for teachers). While PSC's continue to be called to facilitate classroom guidance lessons, there will also be a call for counsellor educators to provide effective training for them. Regarding the training of school counsellors, CACREP (2001) states that the standards require that graduates are knowledgeable about issues that may affect the development and functioning of students (e.g. abuse, violence, eating disorders, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, childhood depression, and suicide). CACREP requires counsellor education programmes to provide instruction pertaining to

the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the development of school counselling comprehensive programmes (e.g., ASCA National Model for School Counselling Programmes, 2005). In addition, counsellor education programmes must include educational materials about various systems that affect students at school and home in order to be aware of the multitude of issues that affect academic success (CACREP, 2001).

### **The ASCA National Model and School Counsellors Training**

The American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) positions that school counsellors are best prepared through master's-level and doctoral-level programmes that align with the philosophy and vision of the ASCA National Model (2019), the ASCA School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019), the ASCA Standards for School Counselling Programme Preparation (2019), the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014) and the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counsellors (2016). In their graduate programmes (CACREP, 2009).

These programs emphasize training in the implementation of a school counselling program that enhances student achievement and success. Students in school counsellor preparation programs need direct training and supervision in leadership and the implementation of a school counselling programme; Understand the organizational structure and governance of the educational system, as well as cultural, political and social influences on current educational practices. Address legal, ethical and professional issues in schools. Understand developmental theory, counselling theory, career counselling theory, social justice theory and multiculturalism; Understand mental health and the continuum of services, including prevention and intervention strategies for addressing academic, career and social/emotional development to enhance student success for all students. Deliver effective instruction, appraisal and advisement, and counselling. Collaborate and consult with stakeholders (for example families/guardians, teachers, administration, and community stakeholders) to create learning environments promoting student educational equity and success for all students. Identify impediments to student learning, developing strategies to enhance learning and collaborating with stakeholders to improve student achievement. Ensure equitable access to resources promoting academic achievement, social/emotional growth and career development for all students. Use advocacy and data-informed school counselling practices to close achievement and opportunity gaps. Understand how the school counselling programmes relate to the educational programme. Understand outcome research data and best practices as identified in the school counselling research literature. Understand the importance of serving on school leadership teams and acting as educational leaders (ASCA National Model, 2019).

### **School Counsellors Training in Cameroon**

Though guidance and counselling had received recognition and was gradually gaining grounds as an agent of change or an intervention tool in Cameroon, its impact on the society remained minimal for many reasons amongst them: The shortage of trained and qualified staff, insufficient national training institution for counselling and the high cost of training and the inadequacy of some practicing counsellors (Etape, 2022). However, the rapid innovations and advancement in science and technology as well as increased emphasis on the psychology of education present specialized needs which cannot be addressed without sufficient preparation and training. For these and other reasons, a section for training of school counsellors was established within the Department of Science of Education in the "Ecole Normale Supérieure", Yaoundé in 1982 by Presidential Decree No. 79/309 of the 10th of August, 1979. Admission into the two-year programme is by direct competitive examinations (Etape, 2022).

Etape (2022) affirms that today many more counselling programmes have been introduced in other state universities in the country. There exists the department of counselling in the Universities of Yaounde 1, Maroua, Buea, Bertua, Ebolow and Bamenda precisely in the Higher Teacher Training Colleges of these universities. Counsellors are also trained in other schools like

the Higher Technical Teachers Training Colleges of Kumba, Douala, Ebolowa and Bamenda. In addition, the Department of Counselling Psychology has gone operational in the Faculty of Education of the University of Bamenda while the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Buea and that of Psychology in the University of Yaoundé 1 all run Masters training programmes for counsellors. This has broadened the scope of the discipline hence many more people are beginning to see the need for counselling in our schools (Mungwa, 2013). The focal point of counselling in Cameroon has been to enable students understand and accept who they are, so that their innate talents can be discovered and used efficiently to make life more meaningful. Graduates of these colleges are posted to work in universities and secondary schools (Etape, 2022). Tita-Nghamun (2016), further postulates that the history of guidance and counselling in Cameroon is divided into three main eras: Searching Era (1945-1968), Identity Era (1968-1982) and the New Direction Era (1982-2005).

### **School Counselling Practice**

According to ASCA (2005), the practice of counselling means rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organizations or the general public any service involving the application of principles, skills, techniques, methods or procedures of the counselling profession, including appraisal activities, counselling, consulting and referral activities. Ojo (2005) opines that there are three main ways through which counselling can be carried out:

**Directive Counselling:** Under directive counselling the counsellor issues certain instructions to the counsellee or he is directed to do certain things e.g he is asked to behave in a particular manner, asked to abstain from alcohol or drug, asked to respect his colleagues and superiors.

**Non Directive Counselling:** Under non directive counselling counsellor does not issue directions but observe the behaviour and attitude of the counsellee towards his work and his colleagues and superiors and subordinates. If he errs then counsellor comes to his rescue and corrects him realizing him that he was wrong. He will not issue him any instructions or will not direct him.

**Eclectic Counselling:** Eclectic counselling is a combination of directive and non-directive technique depending upon the situational factors. This approach in counselling is best characterised by its freedom to the counsellor to use whatever procedures or techniques seem to be the most appropriate to any particular time for any particular client. This counselling is one where one who is willing to utilize any procedures which hold promise even though their theoretical bases differed markedly. This counselling recognizes that each theory may contain some truth and that so long as a final decision between theories cannot be made practical necessity justifiably takes precedence over orthodoxy. The counsellor in this counselling may start with directive technique but switches over to non-directive counselling if the situation requires. He may also start with the non-directive technique and switches over to directive techniques if the situation demands. So the counsellor in this counselling makes use of directive and non-directive counselling and also of any other type which may be considered useful for the purpose of modifying the ideas and attitudes of the counsellee. Ojo (2005) further state that counselling takes place in two major ways, namely: individual counselling and group counselling.

**Individual Counselling:** This is referred to as one-to-one counselling. It occurs between the trained counsellor (therapist) and his client (counsellee). The goal of this is to help the client to understand himself, clarify and direct his thought, in order to make a worthwhile decision. Through this, clients' problems are alleviated. Ojo (2005) remarked that it is mainly to bring about change in the client either by altering maladaptive behavior, learning the decision-making process or preventing problems.

**Group Counselling:** Also known as classroom guidance, large group counselling or a psychoeducational group is as an integral part of a school's counselling programme (Gonzalez, 2011). This is a counselling session that takes place between a trained counsellor and a group of

people. The number of clients in a group should not be more than seven, or at least ten, in order to have a cohesive group and an effective well controlled counselling session. Members of the group are clients/counselees whose tasks or problems that are meant for resolution are similar. During group counselling, a free atmosphere is allowed and freedom of speech is encouraged. The counselees are free to express themselves individually as counselling progresses so that problems to be resolved would be open for all to consider and benefit from. All counselees express their feelings and the counsellor during group counselling is to help remove the masks covering the problem. He helps open up the problem with the professional competence and knowledge he possesses. The counsellor is not just a member of the group; he is to direct the affairs and situations (Ojo, 2005). School counsellors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski, 2003). Through leadership, advocacy and collaboration, school counsellors promote equity and access to rigorous educational experiences for all students. School counsellors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Sandhu, 2000) and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counselling programme. The American School Counsellor Association recommends a school-counsellor-to student ratio of 1:250. In reality this ratio is not respected as most school counsellors are often over loaded.

Egbo (2008) opines that the rationale for guidance and counselling in schools is based on the belief that prevention is always better than cure in every aspect of life. She therefore noted that counselling no doubt has the key for the prevention of almost all the problems associated with learning therefore the need to understand the services provided under the school guidance programme. The school should make arrangements to enlist the support of the parents and introduce them to the idea of guidance and counselling. Therefore, in an effective guidance and counselling programme, various guidance and counselling services are offered to assist students in personal development and psychological growth towards maturity. It takes a well-trained guidance counsellor to effectively implement a guidance and counselling programme, with its various guidance and counselling services which are offered to assist students in personal development and psychological growth towards maturity. According to TitaNghamun (2016), these services include:

**Orientation Services:** Orientation service is provided to new comers and those who go to a new class or new course in the school set up. It is a well-known fact that new students in a school or those who gain promotion into higher classes are heterogeneous in nature as they are from different family backgrounds, from different socio-economic status, from different areas, and from different abilities, interests, aptitudes and skills (Obinaju, 2011) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016). Orientation service is normally meant for students to enable them to know school courses, rules, regulations, different facilities given to the students by school and to know the clear image of the school. On the same line school also keeps record of the students about their bio-data including identification, socioeconomic background, capacities and abilities, interest for courses etc.

**Assessment Services:** Appraisal involves the collection, administration, interpretation and clinical usage of variety of test devices in order to provide effective counselling services to both pupils and students in a given institution (Tita-Nghamun, 2016). This involves a teacher counsellor collecting, analysing and using a variety of objective data that can enhance better understanding of pupils/students related issues. A teacher counsellor without adequate and reliable information of a pupil/student will have difficulties in assisting him/her (Tita-Nghamun, 2016). It is therefore important to collect and make available a variety of information through observation, interview, testing, history, and social adjustment data about each child so that they can be in a position to plan a satisfying educational, vocational and social programme.

Individual Inventory Service or Appraisal Service: Is an important type of guidance service which may be recognized often as “pupil’s” inventory service. It is very much essential for pupils as it enables the student to know “himself” at the time of taking any decisions regarding his education and career. Really the pupils or student proceeds in his educational set-up as he/she has made proper choice regarding concerned subject or courses according to his own abilities, interests, aptitudes, attitudes and skills. The adequate and accurate data are collected for the same purpose Egbo (2008).

Educational and Occupational Information Services: These services have the aim of providing students with better knowledge of educational, vocational and social opportunities that can be used to make better- and well-informed decisions. In universities and secondary schools, students need at all times to make decisions about their education, career and social life. Tita-Nghamun (2016) observe that students need information related to job opportunities, training opportunities, and academic qualifications. They further opine that students must not only be exposed to such information but must also have an opportunity to react to it in a meaningful way with others.

Counselling Service: Is designed to help an individual student analyze himself/herself by relating their capabilities, achievements, interests and mode of adjustment to what new decision they have to make (Tita-Nghamun, 2016). This service is very critical for the students because they need it to solve career, academic, personal and social problems which they encounter in life. The service is designed to facilitate self-understanding through individual or group relationships. They further support this by observing that effective guidance and counselling in secondary schools and other learning institutions has become extremely important in guiding students on the relationship between health and the environment, life-earning skills, the knowledge and attitudes that lead to success or failure in life. Effective counselling service should assist in improving the self-image of the students and facilitate better achievement in academic performance.

Other services include: referral service; collaboration service; consultation service; coordination service and the placement and follow-up service.

### **Challenges Faced during Practice**

Pereira & Rekha (2017) state that despite the counselling services in schools, counsellors still face challenges when exercising their functions. To them, some counsellors are self-critical in practice and have troubling reaction to clients since they do not know what to do in a counselling session.

Furthermore, Karatas and Kaya (2015) also stated that despite all job definitions for counselling, school counsellors sometimes have to do tasks that are not aligned with their professional responsibilities. This is because of prejudice of school administrators and teachers against guidance and counselling services.

As highlighted in studies by Bunce and Willows (2001) and McMahan and Patton (2001), external networks of peers and other allied professionals are key systems that school counsellors naturally approach and rely on for support. These systems also pose challenges, such as adhering to professional ethics, ongoing professional development, and other professional requirements. The time needed to manage links with counselling networks and professional bodies is also a major challenge.

The community and social services is yet another set of systems that school counsellors often have to work with. Referral procedures for social services often differ from one agency or locality to another. Programmes and schemes such as financial subsidies and hardship scholarships may not be under the counsellor’s control, so school counsellors may encounter particular difficulties in helping clients and/or families in accessing those services and resources..

## **Challenges Faced by Schools Counsellors in Cameroon**

**Lack of trained counsellors:** Despite the fact that there are many holders of higher degrees in guidance and counselling in Cameroon today, not as many are qualified to be real counsellors because they lack the skills necessary for the practice. There is limited number of trained counsellors in Cameroonian schools and the ones already trained choose to go into non-school settings.

**Doubt about the efficacy of guidance and counselling:** Some people such as uninitiated colleagues, teachers, principals or administrators doubt the efficacy of counselling. They are skeptical about reliance on its use.

**Lack of commitment of Government officers:** although the Government entrenched the guidance and counselling programme in the Cameroon University education system, there is still much to do when it comes to practical support and its implementation. He noted that more committed action will help the growth of the profession.

The problem of lack of opportunities for ongoing professional development. Therefore, school counsellors often have to face challenges in receiving proper supervision, support, and ongoing education and training while practicing in schools.

Issues relating to personal well-being and professional development of school counsellors are important matters of concern for practitioners as well as other stakeholders. These issues may lead to a loss of professional identity as suggested by Bunce and Willower (2001).

From time to time, school counsellors are required to interact with the legal and healthcare systems. This is especially so when students or clients are involved in crime or 'at risk' behaviours or require mental health assistance. Counsellors find interacting with such systems challenging, as they themselves may not be regularly up-to-date on vital procedures and information due to their typical everyday separation from these institutions. Overall, school counsellors have to manage the differences as well as the inconsistencies that almost always exist between and among the many systems they have to work with. The main challenge is to ensure that they are sufficiently familiar with and able to work with different systems so that their clients and other stakeholders can benefit from the opportunities, services and resources available. This competence should therefore be instilled in the school counsellor during their training. Tantoh (2024) however noted in her study on the training of school counsellors and its influence on their practice that most counsellors admitted that they did not have adequate training, which permits them to function appropriately, and so needed professional development to upgrade their competence on the field.

## **Professional development of School Counsellors**

According to Uthental and Brown (2006), professional development is any type of educational experiences related to an individual's work. For school counsellors to be as effective as possible, they continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best counselling and educational practices. These educational experiences could be through a formal process such as conferences, seminars, and workshops. It could also be through collaborative learning among members of a work team; or a course at a college or university. Professional development can also occur in informal contexts such as discussions among colleagues, independent reading and research, observation of a colleague's work, or other learning from a peer (Uthental and Brown, 2006).

Paisley and Benschhoff (1996) cited in Walley (2009) assert that pre-service training is not the only way in which school counsellors become effective. In fact, they believe that counsellor preparation is a continuous process that relies heavily upon on the job training and ongoing professional development. In addition to coursework for school counsellors, the internship

experience remains a critical component of education, training, and professional socialization that intertwines standard coursework with practical experience and application (CACREP, 2001; Crespi and Butler, 2005) cited in Walley (2009). Thus, the internship provides an opportunity for students to perform, under supervision, a variety of counselling activities that a professional counsellor is expected to perform.

Paisley and Benshoff (1996) cited in Walley (2009) further asserted that school counsellor preparation is a continuous process that is primarily the responsibility of the counsellor and should be augmented by local school systems, supervisors, and principals who should share the responsibility for school counsellors continued professional development. More specifically, Clark and Horton-Parker (2002) noted that many school counsellors access additional training on their own and that the purpose of such professional development is to attain experiences and knowledge that will assist them in fulfilling duties that are required in a position for which the counsellor is often already employed.

It is imperative counsellor educators are structuring the professional identity development of counsellors in training through guided learning experiences (Brott, 2006). School counsellors in training should become familiar with methods to implement comprehensive school counselling programs (Luke and Bernard, 2006; Murphy and Kaffenberger, 2007; Studer, 2006) cited in Kozlowski and Huss (2013). Two ways trainees traditionally become familiar with implementing counselling programs are in practicum and internship experiences. What is problematic about practicum and internship experiences for school counsellor trainees is that counsellor educators typically attribute more importance to concepts that fit within traditional training models, such as individual and group counselling, than they do to concepts outside the traditional counsellor training framework.

Specifically, educators' perceived aspects such as working toward school-wide change as ancillary (Colbert et al., 2006) cited in Kozlowski and Huss (2013). In addition counsellor educators reportedly viewed the school-wide role of the school counsellor as the least important priority in the training program when compared to the more traditional roles and skills of the community counsellor, such as individual and group counselling skills (Perusse, Goodnough, and Noel, 2001) cited Kozlowski and Huss (2013).

### **Objective**

To investigate the professional development of school counsellors and its influence on their practice.

### **Research Question**

How does the professional development of school counsellors influence their practice?

### **Research Hypothesis**

**Ho:** The professional development of school counsellors has no significant influence on their practice.

**Ha:** The professional development of school counsellors has a significant influence on their practice.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The concurrent nested mixed-method research design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the descriptive survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions. This study was carried out in Mfoundi and Mezam Divisions of the Center and North West Regions of Cameroon respectively. Specifically data was collected from resident school counsellors from these two

regions. The population of this study consisted of all resident school counsellors of the Center and North West Regions of Cameroon. These two regions were chosen purposefully because they have the characteristics of the population under study. The two regions also have training institutions for school counsellors. Also, the researcher wanted to have respondents from the two subsystems of education in Cameroon. The North West Region has a total of 209 resident school counsellors spread over government secondary schools in its seven divisions. The Center Region has 710 resident school counsellors who are found in the different government secondary schools of its ten divisions. The target population consists of all resident school counsellors of both sexes of the Mfoundi and Mezam Divisions. Mezam Division has 108 resident school counsellors while Mfoundi Division has 305 resident school counsellors. The accessible population consists of resident school counsellors of selected government secondary schools of the Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions of the North West and Center Regions respectively.

**Table 1: School Counsellors in the North West Region**

S/N	DIVISION	NUMBER OF COUNSELLORS
1	BOYO	20
2	BUI	25
3	DONGA-MANTUNG	15
4	MENCHUM	16
5	MEZAM	108
6	MOMO	11
7	NGO-KETUNJIA	14
TOTAL		209

Source: Data base of guidance counsellors for the North West Regional Delegation for Secondary Education (2023)

**Table 2: School Counsellors in the Center Region**

S/N	Division	Number of Counsellors
1	HAUT-SANGA	58
2	LEKIE	50
3	MBAM-et-INOUBOU	40
4	MBAM-et-KIM	20
5	MEFOU-et-AFAMBA	50
6	MEFOU-et-AKONO	102
7	MFOUNDI	305
8	NYONG-et-KELLE	30
9	NYONG-et-MFOUMOU	25
10	NYONG-et-SO'O	30
TOTAL		710

Source: Data base of guidance counsellors for the Center Regional Delegation for Secondary Education (2023)

The sample for this study was drawn from the accessible population of 262 resident school counsellors, 80 from Mezam Division and 182 from Mfoundi Division. Due to the limited number of counsellors in the 25 accessible schools in Mezam Division, the sample size constitutes all 80 counsellors in the 25 accessible schools and all 169 from the 182 counsellors in the 16 schools in Mfoundi division. In total, the sample size of the study consists of 249 counsellors out of the accessible of 262 counsellors in the 41 accessible schools in both divisions.

The sample size for the study was estimated directly using sample calculation for one proportion for survey study with the help of EpiInfo 7.0 using a higher design effect of 1.6 and not 1.0 used

by the Krejcie and Morgan table, which only estimated the minimum sample size of every given population for survey studies. Thus, using a higher design effect of above 1.0, it enabled the researcher to collect adequate information/data from respondents thus increasing the internal and external validity of the study and its findings. It also enables the researcher to confidently generalize the findings of the study to the population. Below is the formula used for the sample size estimation with the support of EpiInfo 7.0, a statistical software design by Center for Disease Control in USA.

Where:

$N$  = Total number of participants

$Z$  = Z value corresponding to the confidence level, =95%

$d$  = absolute precision =5% (It should be noted that the smaller the precision, the higher the sample size and the more reliable the findings). A precision value of 5% was then considered acceptable for a good statistical significance.

$P$  = expected proportion in the population =50% for optimal sample size estimation.

Design effect=1.6 (By this, the sample gotten at 1.0 was multiple by 1.6).

The researcher used both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to get the sample of this study. For the target population of this study, the convenient and purposive sampling techniques were used. To select the accessible population for school counsellors, the researcher did simple random sampling of the public secondary schools within Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions. This was to ensure that all the schools within the selected divisions had the probability of being included in the population of the study. After getting the schools from which respondents were drawn, the researcher did purposive and convenient sampling to get data from the counsellors within the schools selected. Purposive and convenient sampling were used here because some counsellors in the selected schools were on leave and some were not on seat so the researcher worked with those she met on seat. To get the required number of respondents, the researcher added more schools so as to get more respondents to replace those who were absent in the schools with the accessible population. Also, in Mezam since some of the schools chosen were not functional, the researcher had to do online delivery to the counsellors in those schools who then responded to the instrument. The research instruments used to collect data were the questionnaire and interview guide.

The data collected from the field was first processed using EpiData 3.1 whereby, all the participants' responses were keyed, in accordance with each of the test items. During this process of data entering, the demographic information and the test items were coded with numbers to facilitate the data entering and the questionnaires were assigned with serial numbers. The reason for coding and trace the individual responses of participants and to carry out any verification in areas of uncertainty if need arise. After the data was completely entered for all the participants, the data base was exported to SPSS version 25 for further consistency, data range and validation checks with the purpose to first identify invalid codes (data cleaning) with the aid of exploratory statistics such as frequency count, and outliers.

After the data were thoroughly checked for possible errors, the quantitative data were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools used are frequency count, percentages and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings for each variable for a quick comprehension of the overall findings. Furthermore, to examine the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and its influence on practice, the Pearson's test was used because the data for the variables were approximately normally distributed for many of the variables based on the statistics of the test of normality assumption trend of the data. The testing for normality assumption of every data is very important in order to

know the right statistical tests to be applied when computing correlation analysis to void committing type 1 or 2 hypotheses error.

On the other hand, the qualitative data derived from open ended questions was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes and quotations. The themes refer to the umbrella words which captured the main idea of the participants' statements and the quotations are the direct words from the participants. Finally, findings were presented using frequency distribution and thematic tables and on charts with all inferential statistics presented at 95% level of confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels, accepting 5% margin of error.

## FINDINGS

### The Practice of School Counsellors

Ten structured items were used to measure counsellors' opinion on their practice and the findings are presented on Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Counsellors Appraisal of their Field Practice**

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
My training did not adequately prepare me to render orientation services in school	60 (24.4%)	123 (50.0%)	47 (19.1%)	16 (6.5%)	183 (74.4%)	63 (25.6%)
I am unable to effectively carry out assessment service towards my clients	48 (19.5%)	121 (49.2%)	71 (28.9%)	6 (2.4%)	169 (68.7%)	77 (31.3%)
I do not render educational and occupational information services effectively	52 (21.1%)	157 (63.8%)	30 (12.2%)	7 (2.8%)	209 (85.0%)	37 (15.0%)
My training did not equip me to effectively provide counselling services to my client	42 (17.1%)	158 (64.2%)	33 (13.4%)	13 (5.3%)	200 (81.3%)	46 (18.7%)
I do not satisfactorily carry out placement and follow-up service.	33 (13.4%)	76 (30.9%)	120 (48.8%)	17 (6.9%)	109 (44.3%)	137 (55.7%)
I do not adequately offer appraisal service to my clients	25 (10.2%)	87 (35.4%)	123 (50.0%)	11 (4.5%)	112 (45.5%)	134 (54.5%)
Follow-up, research and evaluation service I offer to my clients is not done sufficiently	16 (6.5%)	66 (26.8%)	149 (60.6%)	15 (6.1%)	82 (33.3%)	164 (66.7%)
I do not sufficiently render consultative services to my clients	32 (13.0%)	135 (54.9%)	66 (26.8%)	13 (5.3%)	167 (67.9%)	79 (32.1%)
My training did not adequately equip me to effectively do referrals.	36 (14.6%)	120 (48.8%)	79 (32.1%)	11 (4.5%)	156 (63.4%)	90 (36.6%)
I do not satisfactorily carry out coordination service.	25 (10.2%)	103 (41.9%)	107 (43.5%)	11 (4.5%)	127 (51.6%)	118 (48.0%)
<b>Multiple Responses Set (MRS)</b>	<b>368</b> <b>(15.0%)</b>	<b>1146</b> <b>(46.6%)</b>	<b>825</b> <b>(33.6%)</b>	<b>120</b> <b>(4.9%)</b>	<b>1515</b> <b>(61.6%)</b>	<b>945</b> <b>(38.4%)</b>

Table 3 shows counsellors’ appraisal of their field practice. In aggregate, based on counsellors’ opinion on practice, 61.6% of them said that their training did not adequately prepared them for practice while 38.4% said training adequately prepared them for practice. Specifically, majority of counsellors 183 (74.4%) accepted that their training did not adequately prepare them to render orientation services in school while 63 (25.6%) disagreed. Also, 169 (68.7%) counsellors accepted that they are unable to effectively carry out assessment service towards clients while 77 (31.3%) disagreed. In the same trend, majority of counsellors 209 (85.0%) said they are unable to effectively render educational and occupational information services while 37 (15.0%) said they could effectively do that.

Again, 200 (81.3%) counsellors also opined that their training did not equip them to effectively provide counselling services to clients while 46 (18.7%) said it effectively equipped them. Furthermore, 109 (44.3%) counsellors also indicated that they do not satisfactorily carry out placement and follow-up services while 137 (55.7%) said they do. Findings also showed that 167 (67.9%) counsellors accepted that they do not sufficiently render consultation services to their clients while 79 (32.1%) disagreed to this. Similarly, 156 (63.4%) counsellors opined that their training did not adequately equip them to effectively do referrals while 90 (36.6%) said they were effectively equipped for referrals. Finally, 127 (51.6%) counsellors said they do not satisfactorily carry out coordination services while 118 (48.0%) of them does that satisfactorily. The overall finding on counsellors’ practices is also presented on Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Counsellors’ Appraisal of their Field Practice**

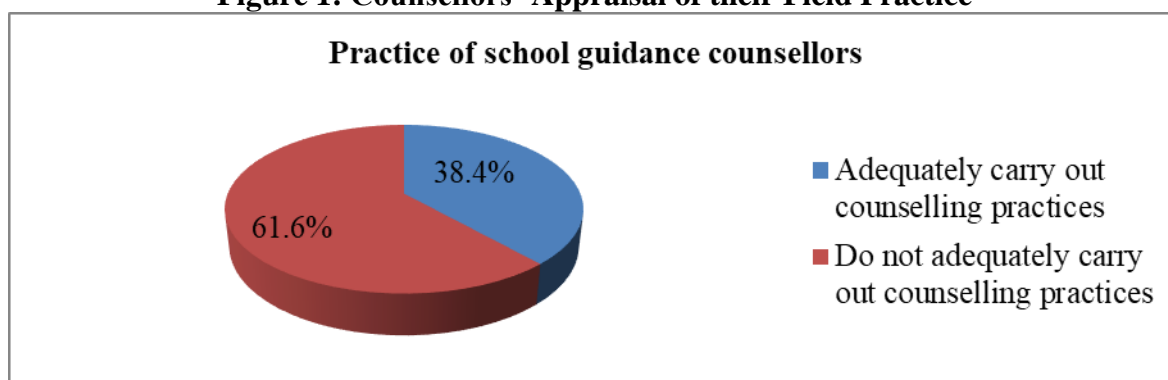


Figure 1: Counsellors’ Appraisal of their Field Practice

Figure 1 shows school counsellors’ appraisal of their overall practice. In aggregate, 61.6% of counsellors admitted that they do not practice adequately while 38.4% said they do practice adequately.

**Research Question**

How does the professional development of school counsellors influence their practice?

Ten close ended items were deduced to capture counsellors’ opinion on professional development and findings are presented on table 4 below.

**Table 4: Counsellors Opinion on Professional Development Programs Organised**

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
I am better able to appreciate individual differences as a counsellor thanks to seminars.	81 (32.9%)	122 (49.6%)	25 (10.2%)	18 (7.3%)	203 (82.5%)	43 (17.5%)
Workshops organised have empowered me to effectively appreciate individuals.	52 (21.1%)	99 (40.2%)	72 (29.3%)	23 (9.3%)	151 (61.4%)	95 (38.6%)

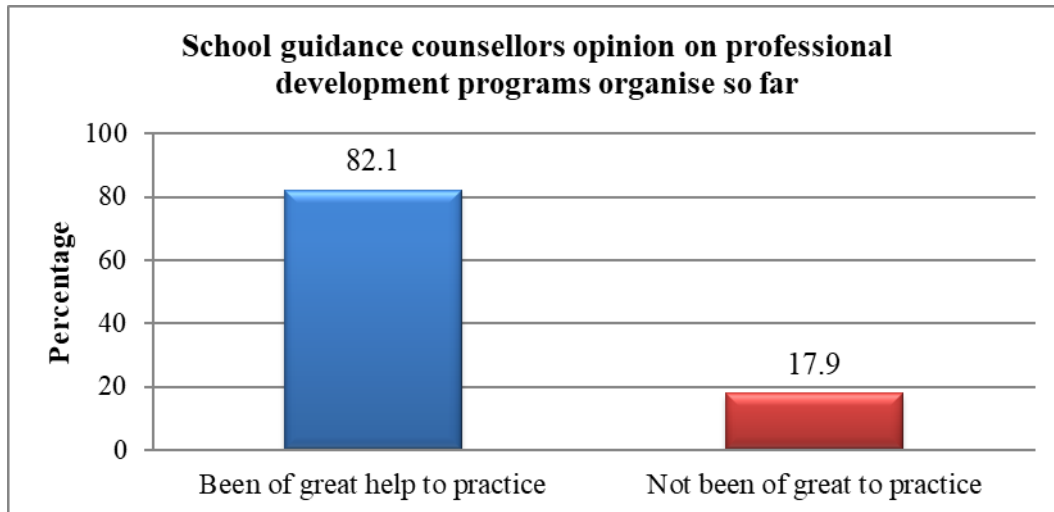
Seminars and workshops have helped me to better appreciate cultural differences as a counsellor.	62 (25.2%)	130 (52.8%)	43 (17.5%)	11 (4.5%)	192 (78.0%)	54 (22.0%)
Seminars and workshops have helped me to upgrade my knowledge in ICT	89 (36.2%)	135 (54.9%)	9 (3.7%)	13 (5.3%)	224 (91.1%)	22 (8.9%)
Seminars have helped me see my role as an advocate and change agent in society.	96 (39.0%)	123 (50.0%)	20 (8.1%)	7 (2.8%)	219 (89.0%)	29 (11.0%)
Conferences that I have attended have helped me to stay current with changes in the profession.	56 (22.8%)	133 (54.1%)	44 (5.3%)	5 (2.0%)	189 (76.8%)	57 (23.2%)
Conferences, seminars and workshops have helped me to understand the importance of networking with stakeholders as a counsellor.	106 (43.1%)	111 (45.1%)	24 (9.8%)	24 (9.8%)	217 (88.2%)	29 (11.8%)
Seminars have helped me to understand human growth and development from a lifespan perspective	109 (44.3%)	111 (45.1%)	21 (8.5%)	5 (2.0%)	220 (89.4%)	26 (10.6%)
Seminars have helped me to understand the numerous changes in the role of a counsellor in a world that is becoming more global and urbanized.	62 (25.2%)	130 (52.8%)	43 (17.5%)	11 (4.5%)	192 (78.0%)	54 (22.0%)
Seminars and conferences have helped me to understand the importance of collaborating with colleagues.	56 (22.8%)	133 (54.1%)	44 (5.3%)	5 (2.0%)	189 (76.8%)	57 (23.2%)
<b>Multiple Responses Set (MRS)</b>	<b>651</b> <b>(33.1%)</b>	<b>964</b> <b>(49.0%)</b>	<b>258</b> <b>(13.1%)</b>	<b>95</b> <b>(4.8%)</b>	<b>1615</b> <b>(82.1%)</b>	<b>353</b> <b>(17.9%)</b>

From Table 4, in aggregate, 82.1% of counsellors indicated that professional development programs organised so far have been of great help to them while 17.9% disagreed. Specifically, 203 (82.5%) of the counsellors accepted that they are able to appreciate individual differences as a counsellor thanks to frequent seminars while 43 (17.5%) of them disagreed. Also, 151 (61.4%) accepted that workshops organised have empowered them to effectively appreciate individuals while 95 (38.6%) disagreed. Again, 192 (78.0%) of the counsellors accepted that seminars and workshops have helped them to better appreciate cultural differences and understand the numerous changes in the role of a counsellor while 54 (22.0%) of them disagreed. Furthermore, 224 (91.1%) of the counsellors accepted that seminars and workshops have helped them to upgrade knowledge in ICT while 22 (8.9%) disagreed.

To elucidate, 219 (89.0%) of the counsellors also accepted that seminars have helped them see their role as an advocate and change agent in society while 29 (11.0%) of them disagreed. Again, 189 (76.8%) of the counsellors also accepted that conferences attended have helped them to stay current with changes in the profession while 57 (23.2%) disagreed. In the same trend, 217 (88.2%) counsellors also accepted that conferences, seminars and workshops have helped them to understand the importance of networking with stakeholders as a counsellor while 29 (10.6%) disagreed. Again, 220 (89.4%) counsellors also accepted that seminars have helped them to understand human growth and development from a lifespan perspective while 54 (22.0%)

disagreed. Finally, 189 (76.8%) of the counsellors also accepted that seminars and conferences have helped them to understand the importance of collaborating with colleagues while 57 (23.2%) disagreed. The overall finding on counsellors' opinion on professional development program is also presented on figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Counsellors Opinion on Professional Development Programs Organised**



From Figure 2, 82.1% of the counsellors opined that professional development programs organized have been of great help to their practice while 17.9% of them stated that the professional development programs have not been of great help to their practice.

Table 5 specifically compare counsellors' opinion on professional development by demographic information. This is to enable us know the opinion for each category of participants as concern professional development programmes they have participated.

**Table 5: Comparing Counsellors Opinion on Professional Development Programs Organised by Demographic Information**

Demographic data			Professional development programs organised		Total based on MRS
			Impactful	Not impactful	
Sex	Male	n	433	111	544
		%	79.6%	20.4%	
	Female	n	1182	242	1424
		%	83.0%	17.0%	
Age group	Below 36 years	n	487	121	608
		%	80.1%	19.9%	
	36-45 years	n	902	178	1080
		%	83.5%	16.5%	
	46-55 years	n	190	50	240
		%	79.2%	20.8%	
	56 years and above	n	36	4	40
		%	90.0%	10.0%	
Years of training	Below 2000	n	141	11	152
		%	92.8%	7.2%	
	2000 to 2005	n	69	43	112
		%	61.6%	38.4%	
	2006 to 2010	n	169	31	200
		%	84.5%	15.5%	

	2011to 2015	n	589	139	728
		%	80.9%	19.1%	
	2016 to 2020	n	576	120	696
		%	82.8%	17.2%	
	Above 2020	n	71	9	80
		%	88.8%	11.3%	
Training institution	ENS Bambili	n	205	27	232
		%	88.4%	11.6%	
	ENS Maroua	n	264	48	312
		%	84.6%	15.4%	
	ENS Yaoundé	n	494	162	656
		%	75.3%	24.7%	
	ENSET Bertoua	n	478	106	584
		%	81.8%	18.2%	
	ENSET Douala	n	39	1	40
		%	97.5%	2.5%	
	HTTTC Yaoundé	n	89	10	99
		%	89.9%	10.1%	
ENSET Kumba	n	26	4	30	
	%	86.7%	13.3%		
Years of practice	Less than 5 years	n	285	35	320
		%	89.1%	10.9%	
	5-10 years	n	932	220	1152
		%	80.9%	19.1%	
	11-15 years	n	174	42	216
		%	80.6%	19.4%	
	16-20 years	n	94	26	120
		%	78.3%	21.7%	
	Above 20 years	n	130	30	160
		%	81.3%	18.8%	
Highest qualification	DIPOCO	n	1117	251	1368
		%	81.7%	18.3%	
	Master's	n	498	102	600
		%	83.0%	17.0%	

As indicated on Table 5, comparing the counsellors opinion professional development programs organised by demographic data, findings showed that irrespective of their sex, age group, training institution, year of training, years in practice and highest qualification, majority of the counsellors with percentage ranging from 61.6 to 97.5% indicated that professional development organise so far have been of great help in the practice.

In addition to the close ended items, the counsellors were asked to mention the weaknesses of the professional development organize and their responses are presented on table 6 below.

**Table 6: Counsellors' Opinion on Weaknesses of the Professional Development they received**

Received professional development	Weaknesses from professional development received		
	Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Yes	Theoretical	Many	<p>“Lack of demonstration tools during workshops or seminars. Everything is done verbally”.</p> <p>“The development programmes are more theoretical than practical”.</p> <p>“Limited practical cases are presented during the development programmes”.</p> <p>“The training received from some professional development programs is too theoretical and not practical”.</p> <p>“Sometimes the programs are more theoretical and less practical”.</p>
	Rushing and congested program	Many	<p>“The programmes are always rushed”.</p> <p>“During capacity building seminars presentations are too many in one day that I lose interest in some of them when I am already tired and at the end not getting the most of the seminar”.</p>
	Finance and lack of material resources	Many	<p>“The professional development programmes are very expensive”.</p> <p>“Yes, some challenges are financial issues and lack of training materials and other resources”.</p> <p>“Non-availability of equipment”.</p>
	Unqualified trainers	Few	“The trainers do not really master the issues being tackled”.
	Language barrier	Few	“Language of communication”.
	No follow-up	Few	“Absence of follow-up after training to ensure implementation is taking place”.
	Irregular	Few	<p>“It is not offered periodically”.</p> <p>“The weakness is that such development programs do not come up frequently”.</p>
	Finance	Few	“They are not funded by our institution”.
	Obsolete content	Few	“They rarely pass out new knowledge
	Westernisation	Few	“They use a lot of Western concepts”.
	No need assessment	Few	“They fail to do need assessment to know the actual needs of the counsellors”.
	Limited time	Few	<p>“The only weakness is time. There is always limited time for the programmes”.</p> <p>“The period of the seminars is too bad”.</p>
	Repetition	Few	“There is lot of repetition in some topics”.
No implementation of results	Few	“One of the weaknesses usually faced is that most of the things discussed are not implemented as promised”.	

As indicated on Table 6, asking the counsellors interviewed about professional development programs, all of them said they have attended professional development programs but many reported weaknesses of the professional development programs organised. One of the weaknesses reported by many is that the program was too theoretical as depicted in the statements “*The development programmes are more theoretical than practical*”, “*Limited practical cases are presented during the development programmes*”, “*The training received from some professional development programs are too theoretical and not practical*”. Another weakness reported is that the programs are organised in rush as depicted in the statement “*During capacity building seminars presentations are too many in one day that I lose interest in some of them when I am already tired and at the end not getting the most of the seminar*”.

Furthermore, lack of finance and material resources is another weakness of the program reported “*Yes, some challenges are financial issues and lack of training materials and other resources*”. Other weaknesses reported are that sometimes the trainers are not qualified, language barrier, lack of follow up after training, irregularity in the organization of the programs, obsolete training content, over westernization of the training not often reflecting the realities on ground, limited time, repetition and lack of implementation of results.

Despite the weaknesses of the professional development programmes reported, the counsellors were also asked if the programmes met their expectations in relation to their work challenges faced and their responses are presented on table 7 below.

**Table 7: Counsellors’ Opinion if Professional Development Programmes often meet Expectations in Relations to their Work Challenges Faced**

Professional development programmes organised meetings often meet expectations in relation to work challenges	Justifications		
	Themes	Groundings	Quotations
No	Unqualified resource persons, Training more theoretical	Many	<p>“At times they do and sometimes they do not since training is more theoretical and sometimes the trainers lack good mastery of the subject matter”.</p> <p>“They rarely meet my expectations because most of the resource persons have the same training like me. So, they have very little knowledge to offer”.</p> <p>“Not always meeting my expectations because the resource persons are not that always qualified”.</p> <p>“Inadequate trained staff”.</p>
	Lacking in psychometric testing and referrals	Few	“Partially, because sometimes the programs are lacking in psychometric testing and referrals”.
	Need of finance	Few	“No, training programs need financial assistance and training programs do not provide sufficient information and materials”.

	Language barrier	Few	“Not really. just little since I do not understand French language very well but when they are translated it really helps me”
Yes	Gain skills and knowledge	Many	<p>“Yes, it is during the professional development programmes that my skills in counselling improve”.</p> <p>“Yes, I update my knowledge and become current”.</p> <p>“Yes, sometimes I learn a lot when the presentations are well prepared and presented explicitly”.</p> <p>“Yes, they go a long way to upgrade my counselling skills acquired during training”.</p> <p>“Yes, I have been able to gain some research and advocacy skills”.</p> <p>“Yes, to an extent since new knowledge is gained”.</p>
	Topics reflect counsellors needs	Many	<p>“Yes, it does because most of our topics we treat are taken from the counsellors’ terms of reference”.</p> <p>“Yes, first and foremost, topics treated in these programmes always come from the challenges of counsellors in the field and possible ways of handling them are always arrived at”.</p> <p>“Yes, they do meet our challenges because they give us tips on how to solve our challenges with clients”.</p>
	Digitalisation of counselling	Few	“Yes, they do. Recently the digitalisation of guidance and counselling services has gone a long way to ensure that clients benefit from the services of counselling be it online or offline”.
	Improved learners’ performance	Few	“Yes, for the one I have attended, there was an improvement in the learners’ performance due to better understanding”.
	Solution to daily problems	Few	“Yes, because it brings to light the common problems we face with our students and the various intervention strategies”.

Finally, as indicated on table 7, asking counsellors interviewed if the professional development programs organised often meet their expectations, some of them said it meets their expectations while some said it does not meet their expectations. Among the counsellors who said the development programs do not often meet their expectations, one of the reasons is that the resource persons are unqualified, and training from program is more theoretical as depicted in the statements “*At times they do and sometimes they do not since training is more theoretical and*

sometimes the trainers lack good mastery of the subject matter”, “They rarely meet my expectations because most of the resource persons have the same training like me. So, they have very little knowledge to offer”.

Another reason why the development programs do not meet the expectations of some counsellors is that the training program is lacking in psychometric testing and referrals as depicted in the statements “Partially, because sometimes the programs are lacking in psychometric testing and referrals”. Lack of finance and language barrier are other reasons the training do not meet expectations of some counsellors.

On the contrary, for counsellors that said training programs meet their expectations, one of their dominant reason is that they acquire skills and knowledge as depicted in the statements “Yes, it is during the professional development programmes that my skills in counselling improve”, “Yes, sometimes I learn a lot when the presentations are well prepared and presented explicitly”. Another reason is that topics often feature in the training manual reflect counsellors needs as depicted in the statements “Yes, it does because most of our topics we treat are taken from the counsellors’ terms of reference”, “Yes, first and foremost, topics treated in these programmes always come from the challenges of counsellors in the field and possible ways of handling them are always arrived at”. Furthermore, another reason given is that they are trained on digitalisation of counselling services as narrated “Yes, they do. Recently the digitalisation of guidance and counselling services has gone a long way to ensure that clients benefit from the services of counselling be it online or offline”. Finally, some counsellors said the training has improved on learners’ performance and provided them with solutions to daily problems as narrated in the statements “Yes, because it brings to light the common problems we face with our students and the various intervention strategies”. “Yes, for the one I have attended, there was an improvement in the learners’ performance due to better understanding”.

### Post Training Needs Due to Weaknesses of the Professional Development Programmes and Initial Training from School

Ten close-ended items were deduced to capture counsellors’ opinion on their post-training needs and the findings are presented on table 8 below.

**Table 8: Counsellors Opinion on Post-Training Needs**

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
As a counsellor I constantly need to upgrade my skills in an ever changing world	198 (80.5%)	42 (17.1%)	6 (2.4%)	0 (0.0%)	240 (97.6%)	6 (2.4%)
ICT is one area where I constantly need to upgrade my skills	148 (60.2%)	85 (34.6%)	11 (4.5%)	2 (0.8%)	233 (94.7%)	13 (5.3%)
Cross-cultural knowledge is a major concern for me	77 (31.3%)	123 (50.0%)	46 (18.7%)	0 (0.0%)	200 (81.3%)	46 (18.7%)
Knowledge of diversity which is ever present in our society is one of my major concerns	77 (31.3%)	132 (53.7%)	32 (13.0%)	5 (3.0%)	209 (85.0%)	37 (15.0%)
Change in the demographic profile of society requires that I constantly upgrade my knowledge on children, adolescent, adults and the development of the ageing	135 (54.9%)	97 (39.4%)	11 (4.5%)	3 (1.2%)	232 (94.3%)	14 (5.7%)
Advocacy is one skill I need to learn as a counsellor	81 (32.9%)	123 (50.0%)	38 (15.4%)	4 (1.6%)	204 (82.9%)	42 (17.1%)

I still lack the skill necessary to work with parents	22 (9.8%)	58 (23.6%)	107 (43.5%)	59 (24.0%)	80 (32.5%)	166 (67.5%)
Empathy is a trait I do not have	4 (1.6%)	26 (10.6%)	106 (43.1%)	110 (44.7%)	30 (12.2%)	216 (87.8%)
Genuineness is a trait I still lack	3 (1.2%)	17 (6.9%)	102 (41.5%)	124 (50.4%)	20 (8.1%)	226 (91.9%)
I still have bias for certain categories of clients who come to me	5 (2.0%)	29 (11.8%)	80 (32.7%)	131 (53.5%)	34 (13.9%)	211 (86.1%)
<b>Multiple Responses Set (MRS)</b>	<b>750</b> <b>(30.5%)</b>	<b>732</b> <b>(29.8%)</b>	<b>539</b> <b>(21.9%)</b>	<b>438</b> <b>(17.8%)</b>	<b>1482</b> <b>(60.3%)</b>	<b>977</b> <b>(39.7%)</b>

Form table 8, based on post training needs, in overall, 60.3% of counsellors accepted to have several post-training needs while 39.7% have less post training needs. Specifically, majority of counsellors 240 (97.6%) accepted that they need to upgrade their skills. Similarly, 233 (94.7%) of the counsellors accepted that ICT is one the areas they need to upgrade while 13 (5.3%) disagreed. Also, 200 (81.3%) of the counsellors accepted that cross-cultural knowledge is a major concern for them while 46 (18.7%) disagreed. Furthermore, majority of counsellors 209 (85.0%) opined that knowledge of diversity is one of their major concerns while 37 (15.0%) disagreed. Again, majority of the counsellors 232 (94.3%) accepted that the change in the demographic profile of society requires that they should constantly upgrade their knowledge on children, adolescent, adults and development of the ageing while 14 (5.7%) of them disagreed. Also, 204 (82.9%) of the counsellors accepted that advocacy skill is one thing the need to learn as counsellors while 42 (17.1%) of them disagreed. Furthermore, 80 (32.5%) of the counsellors lack the necessary skills to work with parents while 166 (67.5%) do not. Again, 34 (13.9%) of the counsellors are bias in their counselling while 211 (86.1%) are not. Also, 20 (12.2%) of the counsellors accepted to lack empathy while 216 (87.8%) did not. Finally, 20 (8.1%) of the counsellors are in need of genuineness while 226 (91.9%) do not. The overall finding on post training needs is also presented on figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Counsellors Opinion on Post-Training Needs**

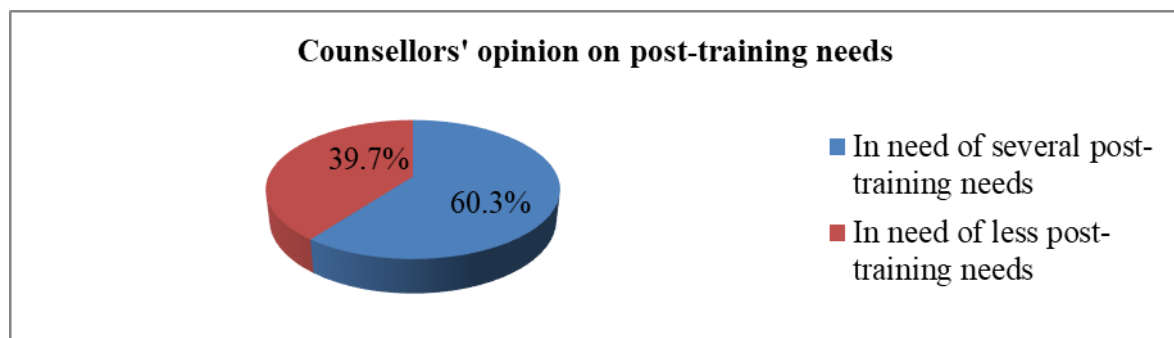


Figure 3 shows the school counsellors opinions on their post-training needs. From the findings, 60.3% of the counsellors indicated that they are in need of several post-training needs while 39.7% indicated that they were in need of less post-training needs.

Table 9 specifically compare counsellors' opinion on their post training needs by demographic information. This is to enable us know the opinion for each category of participants as concern their post-training needs; that if they are the same or different.

**Table 9: Comparing Counsellors Opinion on Post-Training Needs by Demographic Information**

Demographic data			Post-training needs		Total based on MRS
			Several	Few	
Sex	Male	n	417	263	680
		%	61.3%	38.7%	
	Female	n	1065	714	1779
		%	59.9%	40.1%	
Age group	Below 36 years	n	471	289	760
		%	62.0%	38.0%	
	36-45 years	n	809	540	1349
		%	60.0%	40.0%	
	46-55 years	n	171	129	300
		%	57.0%	43.0%	
	56 years and above	n	31	19	50
		%	62.0%	38.0%	
Years of training	Below 2000	n	116	74	190
		%	61.1%	38.9%	
	2000 to 2005	n	76	64	140
		%	54.3%	45.7%	
	2006 to 2010	n	152	97	249
		%	61.0%	39.0%	
	2011 to 2015	n	524	386	910
		%	57.6%	42.4%	
	2016 to 2020	n	544	326	870
		%	62.5%	37.5%	
	Above 2020	n	70	30	100
		%	70.0%	30.0%	
Training institution	ENS Bambili	n	185	105	290
		%	63.8%	36.2%	
	ENS Maroua	n	226	164	390
		%	57.9%	42.1%	
	ENS Yaoundé	n	469	350	819
		%	57.3%	42.7%	
	ENSET Bertoua	n	436	294	730
		%	59.7%	40.3%	
	ENSET Douala	n	41	9	50
		%	82.0%	18.0%	
	HTTTC Yaoundé	n	70	29	99
		%	70.7%	29.3%	
	ENSET Kumba	n	19	11	30
		%	63.3%	36.7%	
Years of practice	Less than 5 years	n	269	131	400
		%	67.3%	32.8%	
	5-10 years	n	852	587	1439
		%	59.2%	40.8%	
	11-15 years	n	155	115	270
		%	57.4%	42.6%	
	16-20 years	n	88	62	150
		%			

		%	58.7%	41.3%	
	Above 20 years	n	118	82	200
		%	59.0%	41.0%	
Highest qualification	DIPOCO	n	1059	651	1710
		%	61.9%	38.1%	
	Master's	n	423	326	749
		%	56.5%	43.5%	

Form table 9, comparing the counsellors' opinion on post training needs by demographic data, findings showed that irrespective of their sex, age group, training institution, year of training, years in practice and highest qualification, many of the counsellors with percentage ranging from 54.3% to 82.0% indicated that they need several post-training needs. In fact, with reference to year of training, majority of counsellors trained in the year 2016 to 2020 and above 62.5% to 70.0% and below 2000; 61.1%, and between 2006 to 2010; 61.0% need several post-training needs more than those trained from 2000 to 2005 and 2011 to 2015. Furthermore, based on training institution, 63.8% of counsellors trained in ENS Bambili, 57.9% of counsellors trained in ENS Maroua, 57.3% of counsellors trained in ENS Yaoundé, 59.7% of counsellors trained in ENSET Bertoua, 82.0% of counsellors trained in ENSET Douala, 70.7% of counsellors trained in HTTTC Yaoundé need several post-training needs and 63.3% of counsellors trained in ENSET Kumba. Furthermore, by year of practice, more of counsellors in practice for less than 5 years 67.3% need several post-training needs slightly more than those who have been practicing for several years. Finally, based on highest qualification, counsellors with DIPCO 61.9% need several post-training needs slightly more than those with Master's Degree 56.5%.

**Table 10: Counsellors Identification of Post-Training Needs**

Themes	Groundings	Quotations
<b>Psychological testing</b>	Many	<p>“We need to understand and use psychological tests”.</p> <p>“Know how to administer tests and know and study some of them”.</p> <p>“Yes, I do. I have a need in psychological testing because we were not trained on that”.</p> <p>“Yes, how to administer tests”.</p> <p>“I need more knowledge on psychological testing because counselling is a continuous process and one needs to adapt to new situations better”.</p> <p>“Psychological testing”.</p> <p>“Yes, I need to have mastery of psychological testing, clients' assessment, referral pathways and theories in problem solving”.</p> <p>“Today, counselling entails a lot of case follow- up. I still need more knowledge on psychological testing”.</p>
<b>Knowledge in psychology</b>	Few	<p>“Knowledge in psychology will enable me understand clients, be patient and calm in stressful situations and also have active listening skills”.</p> <p>“Training on managing psychological cases and overall procedure on individual case management”.</p>
<b>ICT</b>	Few	<p>“We need ICT skills”</p> <p>“ICT training”.</p> <p>“I need training in ICT, psychological support and disaster management”.</p> <p>“Making effective use of ICT in my practice”.</p>

<b>Office space and logistics</b>	Few	“Yes, in my place of practice there is lack of space and this makes confidentiality with my clients difficult” “I need more logistics to carry out my practice”.
<b>Seminars and workshops</b>	Few	“Because from time to time, some of the skills can be forgotten. So there is always need for seminars and workshop to bring back to light some of the skills that were learnt during training”.
<b>Placement</b>	Few	“Identifying placement resources around me for clients”.
<b>Specialisation</b>	Few	“With the changing world, there is need for some specialization”.
<b>Contextualisation of training</b>	Few	“Most often what obtains in the field is different from what was obtained in the school. The training should be adapted to our context and experiences”
<b>Equipment / tools</b>	Few	“We need effective counselling tools and equipment such as counselling aids, tests batteries”.
<b>Referral skills</b>	Few	“Referral skills”. “Carrying out and following up referrals”.
<b>Marital counselling skills</b>	Few	“Yes, when friends or couples have marital problems, I find it difficult to help. I need training on marital counselling”.
<b>Ethical issues</b>	Few	“I still need to acquire more when it comes to ethical issues in counselling”.
<b>Management of drug addiction</b>	Few	“Techniques in handling severe cases of drug addiction”.
<b>Mental health issues</b>	Few	“I need training on mental health”.

From table 10, asking the counsellors interviewed about their post-training needs, many of them said they need to be trained on psychological testing as depicted in the statements “*Yes, I do. I have a need in psychological testing because we were not trained on that*”, “*I need more knowledge on psychological testing because counselling is a continuous process and one needs to adapt to new situations better*”, “*Psychological testing*”. Also, some of them said they need to be trained on knowledge in psychology as depicted in the statement “*Knowledge in psychology will enable me understand clients, be patient and calm in stressful situations and also have active listening skills*”. Again, another post training need mentioned is ICT as depicted in the statement “*I need training in ICT, psychological support and disaster management*”, “*Making effective use of ICT in my practice*”. Furthermore, some need office space and logistics, seminars and workshops, and skills to carry out placement. Again, some of the counsellors said there is need for specialization in training, contextualization of training to reflect the needs of Cameroon and provide equipment and tools. Finally, some counsellors need referral skills, skills on marital counselling, skills on ethics and skills to manage drug addiction and mental health issues.

In addition to identifying the post-training needs, the counsellors were also asked whether or not provision of their post-training needs would improve on their practice and their responses are presented on table 11 below.

**Table 11: Counsellors' Opinion if Provision of their Needs would improve their Practice**

Themes	Grounding	Quotations
Enhanced confidence and competence	Many	<p>“Yes, it makes you feel confident and competent”.</p> <p>“My practice will improve because there is no counselling without psychological testing and follow-up”.</p> <p>“Yes, my competence in counselling will greatly improve. I will gain skills and knowledge on referral services”.</p> <p>“With adequate counselling tools and equipment effective and adequate counselling will be done”.</p> <p>“Yes, I will adequately and with competence carry out my duty”.</p> <p>“To an extent, it will enhance my confidence in handling different counselling services”.</p>
Effective management of clients	Many	<p>“I will be able to effectively manage and overcome mental and emotional issues, actively listening to clients, creating coping strategies and developing treatment plans.</p> <p>“Yes, it will help my clients feel at ease when we are having sessions”</p> <p>“Yes, this will enable me to better solve problems in our context”.</p> <p>“Yes, I will effectively manage a child knowing the results of the tests”.</p> <p>“Yes, my practice will improve because I will be able to better manage my clients”.</p>
Better diagnosis and file management	Few	<p>“This will enable me to better carry out diagnosis and management of files using computers”</p> <p>“Yes, my practice will greatly improve because I will be able to effectively do diagnosis and many problems faced by clients will be handled”.</p>
Enhanced communication	Few	<p>“Yes, this will help to reduce the many sessions with clients because I can easily communicate through computer rather than meeting the client face-to-face”.</p>
Enhanced efficiency	Few	<p>“Yes, because workshops and seminars will increase efficiency with respect to dealing with problems faced by adolescents”.</p>
Boast self-esteem	Few	<p>“It will boast my self-esteem as a counsellor being grounded on ethics”.</p>
Improved output and results	Few	<p>“Yes, I will be sure of expected results because of the new techniques learnt”.</p>

As indicated on Table 11, asking the counsellors interviewed if providing their post training needs would improve on their practice, all of them said their practice would improve upon provision of their post training needs. Many of them said it would enhance their competence and enhance confidence during practice as depicted in the statements “*My practice will improve because there is no counselling without psychological testing and follow-up*”, “*Yes, my competence in counselling will greatly improve. I will gain skills and knowledge on referral services*”, “*With adequate counselling tools and equipment effective and adequate counselling will be done*”. Furthermore, some respondents said it they will effectively manage their clients upon provision of their post-training needs as depicted in the statements “*I will be able to effectively manage and overcome mental and emotional issues, actively listening to clients, creating coping strategies and*

developing treatment plans', "Yes, it will help my clients feel at ease when we are having sessions".

Again, some respondents said they would better do diagnosis and file management when their post-training needs are provided as depicted in the statements "This will enable me to better carry out diagnosis and management of files using computers", "Yes, my practice will greatly improve because I will be able to effectively do diagnosis and many problems faced by clients will be handled". Furthermore, some counsellors said provision of their post training needs would enhance their communication as narrated "Yes, this will help to reduce the many sessions with clients because I can easily communicate through computer rather than meeting the client face-to-face". To some, they said it would enhance their efficiency at work "Yes, because workshops and seminars will increase efficiency with respect to dealing with problems faced by adolescents". Finally, some counsellors said provision of their post-training needs would boost their self-esteem and improve on output and results as depicted in the statement "It will boost my self-esteem as a counsellor being grounded on ethics". "Yes, I will be sure of expected results because of the new techniques learnt".

### Verification of Hypothesis:

**Ho:** The professional development of school counsellors has no significant influence on their practice.

**Ha:** The professional development of school counsellors has a significant influence on their practice.

**Table 12: Perceived Impact of Professional Development Programs on Training on Practice**

Control Variables			Professional development	Counsellors' practice
-none <sup>a</sup>	Professional development	R-value	1	.339**
		p-value		.000
		df	0	243
	Counsellors' practice	R-value	.339**	1.000
		p-value	.000	.
		df	243	0
	Post training needs	R-value	.420	.611**
		p-value	.000	.000
		df	243	243
Post training needs	Professional development	R-value	1	.809
		p-value		.000
		df	0	243
	Counsellors' practice	R-value	.809	1
		p-value	.000	
		df	243	0

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

Statistically, as shown on table 12, professional development has a significant, positive but moderate impact on counsellors' practice of (R-value =0.339\*\*, p-value= 0.000< 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation value implies that counsellors are more likely to improve on their practice when they are provided with professional development programmes. However, when the correlation between professional development and counsellors' practice is controlled with addressing of post training needs, the effect on practice became high as indicated by a coefficient value of 0.809. This implies that when professional development is provided that adequately addresses their post-training needs of counsellors, their practice will significantly improve.

Therefore, the hypothesis that states there is a significant relationship between the professional development of school counsellors and their practice was accepted.

## Discussions

Concerning professional development, the findings showed that majority of counsellors indicated that professional development programs organised so far have been of great help to them while only a few disagreed and further analysis showed that professional development has a significant, positive but moderate impact on counsellors' practice. However, despite the moderate effect, the positive sign of the correlation value implies that counsellors are more likely to improve on their practice when they are provided with professional development that adequately addresses their post-training needs and less likely not to improve on their practice when they are provided with professional development programs that do not reflect their post-training needs.

The findings of the study tie with that of Uttenthal and Brown (2006) who carried out a survey on the impact of training on students undertaking counselling skills training at a further education college. Using a structured questionnaire, the authors surveyed students who had completed the course over a ten-year period from 1997 and the findings showed that a significant numbers of the students believed that as a result of the course (professional development program), they had a more positive attitude at work, and enjoyed better relationships at work. Furthermore, in another study carried out by Hayes and Morgan (2011) in Ireland on the practice of counselling by guidance counsellors in post primary schools, the results of the study showed that more than three-fifths of guidance counsellors had been involved in further training since their initial education as counsellors and this also tie with the findings of our study whereby many of the counsellors after initial training have participated in professional development programs.

Again, in another study by Howell et al., (2007) which studied professional demands, inclinations, and daily procedures among 226 high school counsellors in Utah, findings revealed that counsellors did attend continuing education courses to stay in compliance with their counsellor certification. All above findings and studies simply showed that professional development programs have been of great help to counsellors by covering some of the gaps in their initial training before professional practice.

However, while the professional development programs have been of help to majority of counsellors as shown in our study, they were many reported weaknesses of the programs such as over theoretical oriented training, lack of finance and material resources, unqualified resource persons sometimes, language barrier, lack of follow up after training, irregularity in the organization of the programs, obsolete training content sometimes, over Westernization of the training not reflecting the realities on ground often, limited time, repetition and lack of implementation of results. This simply implies that though the professional development programs have been impacting counsellors positively, there is still need for improvement. The above reported weaknesses may account for the reason why the impact of the professional development programs to counsellors has been moderate and not strong/ very strong.

The weaknesses of the professional development programs such as theory dominated training; obsolete training content and sometimes inadequate qualified resource persons, and westernization of the training not reflecting the realities on ground will definitely compromise training quality and this further ties with the findings of Howell et al. (2007) who indicated 62% of the counsellors in their study paid for more than half of the cost to attend courses that were not relevant to their job. Counsellors want to stay current in their job via acquiring new skills, knowledge and attitude and if counsellors are not receiving the kind of training that is pertinent to their expected duties, there is a strong indication that this will affect the effectiveness of school counsellors.

This therefore takes us to the issue of post training needs whereby majority of counsellors accepted to have several post-training needs while few have less post training needs and, these post-training needs of counsellors was found to have, significant, positive and strong impact on their practice. When the counsellors were asked about their post-training needs, many of them said they need to be trained on psychological testing, trained on knowledge in psychology, ICT, placement, referrals, communication, marital counselling, ethics, management of drug addiction cases and mental health issues, provision of equipment, contextualisation of training and providing of good office space and logistics.

Thus, the above findings showed that counsellors do not only need to be trained on some counselling services but, they also need training on professionalism and to be able to handle the plethora of problems facing in the current school milieu of which some were never part of their training curriculum. In fact, all of the counsellors as depicted in the findings said their practice would improve upon provision of their post training needs in that their competence and confidence would be enhanced, clients will be effectively managed, diagnosis and file management would be better carried out, communication skills would be enhanced, and their self-esteem and output and results will be improved.

The post training needs that the school counsellors sampled in our study mentioned tie with some of the post training needs in the study of Owens, Pernice-Duca, and Thomas (2009) who found out that in addition to workshops, the counsellors needed skills on dropout prevention, helping unmotivated students, violence prevention, and conducting needs assessments. Counsellors felt if they could find ways to address these areas, they could later focus on future career goals of these low performing students. The issue of violence prevention is so much evident in our schools today largely influenced by hard drug consumption by some students. The issue of needs assessment tie with that of psychological testing which is geared towards better understanding of the needs of clients for proper corrective actions to be taken.

Furthermore, the issue of multicultural awareness depicted in the study, Chao (2013) cited in White (2019) as post training need of the counsellors sampled for the study corroborate with the findings of our study whereby some counsellors proposed that their training should empower them to better handle client of diverse cultural backgrounds. These findings not only signify a difference between awareness and knowledge, but also signify counsellors' success with diverse students is based on various levels of training within distinct cultures. Furthermore, in another study carried out by Curry and Bickmore (2012) cited in White (2019) which studied in-service for school counsellors' personal and professional needs, the findings showed that all counsellors expressed the absence of valuable training to improve their work and thus request some post-training needs to improve on their practice.

According to the bio-ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001), children are a product of the reciprocal interaction between their genetic inheritance, behavior, and their environment. Within this ecological framework, development is a joint function of the characteristics of the person, the environment, as well as events over the course of time. Events or conditions within a child's social context, such as the family or neighborhood contexts can affect aspects of his or her social, emotional, and cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Therefore, school counsellor education programs must adequately prepare future practitioners to meet the unique needs of today's school children. The job demand for counselling is becoming complex due to challenges and happenings in the contemporary society and therefore, we expect training institutions to upgrade their curriculum and offer broad training to student counsellors while keeping on sight the contextual realities for a holistic training of counsellors.

According to the Person-centered theory, which focuses on the human interaction between the counsellor and the client, the theory is understood as a process of helping clients discover new and more satisfying personal meanings about themselves and the world they inhabit. Makinde (1984)

cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) opined that students will drive towards growth, health and adjustment through human interaction but, only possible when certain conditions prevail. In the case of school counselling, these conditions should portray counsellors' demonstration/competence in the counsellor-client orientation. Students have been reported to have many problems and counsellors are expected to help the students out.

However, the students cannot be effectively helped out when the counsellors' training is lacking in several aspects. Inadequate training received by counsellors will always be a limiting factor to their effective practice via interaction with students. As reflected in the findings of our study, the counsellors have indicated that provision of their post training needs will not only boost their self-esteem, but it will also enhance their competence, confidence, and ensure quality interpersonal relationship with students. A counsellor cannot solve a child's problem without interaction and therefore, it is imperative that quality training be offered to student counsellors to ensure that in the field of practice, their interpersonal interaction with clients/ students should always bring out the students from their problems face.

According to Holland's theory (1959), vocational choice involves assessing individuals in terms of two or three prominent personality types and then matching the respective types with the environmental aspects of potential careers. The theory predicts that the higher the degree of congruence between individual and occupational characteristics, the better the potential for positive career-related outcomes, including satisfaction, persistence, and achievement. Thus, the school counsellors' training be it initial or in-service is supposed to impact them with the necessary skills needed to practice because acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge enable counsellors to be in congruence with their work environment and clients.

Paisley and Benshoff (1996) cited in Walley (2009) asserted that pre-service training is not the only way in which school counsellors become effective. In fact, they believe that counsellor preparation is a continuous process that relies heavily upon on the job training and ongoing professional development. This is to say schools or systems that do not provide ample opportunities for counsellors to participate in professional development programs are not helping the counsellors to grow in their profession. This so because knowledge changes and events are evolving and the knowledge and skills a counsellor takes to start a career cannot serve him/her till retirement. It is for this reason that every school system must ensure that its counsellors regularly attends programs such as seminars, workshop, conferences and symposia for professional growth and to enhance their practice.

Paisley and Benshoff (1996) further asserted that school counsellor preparation is a continuous process that is primarily the responsibility of the counsellor and should be augmented by local school systems, supervisors, and principals who should share the responsibility for school counsellors continued professional development. Therefore, given that one of the weaknesses reported by the counsellors sampled for our study is the irregular organization of professional development programs, it is imperative that while counsellors are expected to engage in self-directed studies for professional growth, their principals should also support them by creating more opportunities for them to participate in development programs to improve on their practice and to complement the lapses from their initial training.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the professional development of school counsellors and its influence on practice in schools. From the primary data collected and analyzed, the findings showed that majority of the counsellors indicated that they had post training needs and therefore needed professional development in areas where they still had challenges.

In addition to the several post training needs reported by the counsellors, the professional development programs attended during services has been of great help to a majority of the counsellors. However, despite that, several weaknesses were also reported about the development program which is preventing them from gaining adequate skills and knowledge from the programs. The findings equally revealed that professional development programs have significant influence on school counsellors' practice. On this note, it is imperative that the quality of training being offered to student counsellors in training institutions in Cameroon be improved.

The job of a counsellor in contemporary times has been very demanding and as such, training needs to be of high standard to empower the counsellors to effectively address the various situations in the field. Baker and Gerler (2001) opined that guidance and counselling programmes in schools had significant influence on improving discipline, enhancing students' grades, strengthening social skills, helping students make wise decisions on career development and college choices and developing positive study habits and study skills. In line with Baker and Gerler (2001), Hearne and Galvin (2015) also stated that guidance and counselling provision is seen as a whole school responsibility to support the needs of their students. Therefore, this being the case the need for improvement in the quality of training in our training institutions need not be over emphasized.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings of this research, training programs should be organized at the level of the Divisional and Regional Delegations for Secondary Education for school counsellors to upgrade their skills in the use of ICT in counselling. With the changing times it is expected that an efficient and effective practicing school counsellor should do all to be ICT savvy. Counsellors need ICT knowledge in carrying out psychological testing, research on various counselling skills, research on record keeping, research on careers just to name these few indicated by school counsellors as areas in which they are needy. Moreover, through the use of ICT, school counsellors and counsellor educators with expertise in practice could create professional development webinars and other platforms for sharing expertise, addressing concerns, and answering questions about effective classroom management for school counsellors.

It is also recommended that school counsellors be provided with the adequate and necessary facilities to practice such as a convenient counselling office space and office logistics especially in this era where the client upholds his/her privacy. Also, school counsellors should be equipped with other skills such as marital counselling, management of drug addiction, mental health counselling skills through seminars and workshops so as to effectively carter for their clients.

In addition, for counsellor educators, the knowledge created can build on the efforts of Geltner et al. (2011) to insure comprehensive content coverage, appropriate and ample supervised practice, and ability assessments for school counselling students prior to the end of course certification. Counsellor supervisors can incorporate key skills into standards and expectations for school counsellor preparation. School counsellor associations at the divisional, regional, and national levels can use the knowledge to ensure that sufficient and efficiently targeted education efforts are offered to school counselling practitioners. Best practices in the realm of school counselling services can be included in school counsellor association documents (e.g., ethical standards, position statements, the ASCA National Model) and education and advocacy efforts.

School Counselling Chiefs of Services (school, divisional and regional) and RPIs (Regional Pedagogic Inspectors for Counselling) could use the inventory of competencies/skills to inform their professional development planning for school counsellors. For example, school counsellors and teachers together could engage in professional development regarding the competencies/skills that are congruent for both groups of professionals. Likewise, specific educational efforts could be targeted for each group based on competencies that are distinct. School counsellors who exhibit

exemplary classroom management competence could be given the wherewithal and resources to assist other school counsellors in their divisions to enhance their effectiveness in this vital arena.

Furthermore, the ASCA (2009) National Model includes delivery of school counselling core curriculum lessons. Thus, Divisional and Regional Chiefs of Services for Counselling as well as RPIs (Regional Pedagogic Inspectors for Counselling) could use the results to assess a school counsellor's effectiveness in practice as part of the delivery of the school counselling core curriculum. Supervisors may discuss these competencies when offering support for school counsellors regarding counselling activities and encourage their supervisees to use this list as a self or peer-assessment tool. Discussing these results with school administrators could also be advantageous for school counsellors to help establish appropriate expectations regarding the practice of school counselling in schools.

Finally, school counsellors can use the results of this study (and recent research documenting the effectiveness of the school counselling core curriculum, such as Whiston et al., 2011) to educate and advocate with stakeholders for the resources, time, and support needed to effectively implement counselling services in school. The results also may guide development of appropriate expectations and evaluations of school counsellor skills and techniques. Finally, the results may inform individual school counsellors' professional development efforts based on self-assessments of competence.

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