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Social Intelligence As A Predictor Of Competencies Among Prospective Counselors In Public Universities

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Keywords:	Abstract
competence; prospective counselors; social intelligence	*The study investigated social intelligence as a predictor of counseling competencies among prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta States. Its aim was to precisely examine the level of social intelligence among these individuals and determine whether it predicts their counseling competencies. Survey research design using the correlational approach was implemented in the study. The population of the study comprised all Master's students in public universities in Edo and Delta who had completed the practical counseling course. A sample of 81 prospective counselors was used for the study. The researchers used the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) and the Counselor Competency Scale (CCS) as research instruments. Data analyses were carried out using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and regression analysis. The findings of the study implied the social intelligence level of future counselors was high, and social intelligence significantly predicted counseling competencies of prospective counselors (F=8.021, p< 0.01, R2=0.09).*

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Kata kunci:	**Abstrak**
kompetensi; calon konselor; inteligensi sosial	Studi ini menganalisis inteligensi sosial sebagai prediktor kompetensi konseling pada calon konselor di universitas negeri di Negara Bagian Edo dan Delta. Tujuannya adalah untuk menilai tingkat inteligensi sosial di antara calon konselor dan menentukan apakah hal tersebut dapat memprediksi kompetensi konseling mereka. Desain penelitian survei yang mengadopsi pendekatan korelasional digunakan dalam penelitian. Populasi penelitian ini adalah seluruh mahasiswa magister perguruan tinggi negeri di Edo dan Delta yang telah menyelesaikan mata kuliah praktikum konseling. Sampel sebanyak 81 calon konselor digunakan untuk penelitian ini. Peneliti menggunakan Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) dan Counselor Competency Scale (CCS) sebagai instrumen penelitian. Analisis data dilakukan dengan menggunakan statistik deskriptif (*mean* dan standar deviasi) dan analisis regresi. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tingkat inteligensi sosial calon konselor adalah tinggi, dan inteligensi sosial secara signifikan memprediksi kompetensi konseling calon konselor (F=8.021, p< 0.01, R^2=0.09).

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INTRODUCTION

Background Of The Study

Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (Casey, 1996; Gladding, 2017; Stanley, 2013). Specific education and training are required to prepare prospective counselors with the necessary knowledge, skills and appropriate attributes. Counseling entails a person-to-person encounter, in which the professional assists the clients to resolve a conflict. The counselor uses their skills, expertise and practice to help clients face an area of conflict, which may have negatively affected their personal relationships, growth, and developments. Counselors assist individuals who are having issues with relationships, career choices, family, and academic or workplace stress. Counselors also assists individuals with mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, and other challenging problems that can negatively impact well-being and happiness. Therefore, it is vital for the prospective counselors to have the right

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training and the expected attributes to perform their job competently, as this will make them effective in the future counselors (Halinski, 2009; Titu-Marius, 2022).

In counseling, competency reflects the counselors' determined and clearly articulated level of skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary their professional activity. One of the central goals of training the prospective counselor is to promote and ensure their counseling competency (Halinski, 2009; Titu-Marius, 2022). During the course of training, the prospective counselor is expected to demonstrate counseling competencies beyond theoretical and factual content in order to become an effective professional in the future. The prospective counselor should possess and demonstrate competence in the counseling relationship, knowledge in the counseling skills, professional ethical attitudes and practice.

Based on literature review, apart from training and certification, there are more requirements to be a competent counselor. Prospective counselors are expected to possess some attributes, including social intelligence, which may predict their counseling competencies (Obilor & Ikpa, 2019). Social intelligence is the capability to comprehend individuals and social settings and to behave accordingly within the acceptable social standard. It is also referred to as the ability to read persons and understand their goals and inspirations.

People with high social intelligence are usually aware of the differences between what someone says and their true intentions. As a result, people with social intelligence may occasionally be thought to be able to read minds (Alkhutaba, 2022). Individuals with high level of social intelligence are often skilled communicators. They naturally can make others feel comfortable around them. They also like interacting with a wide range of people (Bhat & Khandai, 2016).

For students to be successful in their academics, developing social intelligence is crucial. It becomes a modality to comprehend oneself and others. According to social scientists, social intelligence is a combined indicator of self-awareness and social awareness, social evolution in beliefs and attitudes, and the capacity and desire to handle challenging social change. Additionally, psychologists have argued that social intelligence determines who we are as people (Goleman, 2009).

Social intelligence comprises of four different abilities: i.e., situational awareness, situational response, social skills, and cognitive empathy. Situational response and situational awareness are necessary for prospective counselors' career. Meanwhile,

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cognitive empathy and social skills enable prospective counselors to comprehend the needs and feelings of others, converse with clients efficiently, and form and maintain relationships. Social intelligence encompasses the capability to read and understand behavior, body language, temperaments, feelings, information on social rules, guidelines, acceptable behavior in different social settings; capability to interact with other people and maintain cordial interpersonal relations, as well as the capacity to control one's own behavior, temperaments and feelings according to specific social situations (Goswami, 2018). It is the capacity to comprehend and cope with everyone and to perform intelligently in social dealings; it has to do with both the intellectual features (the tendency to comprehend others) and practical facets (a tendency to agree with and have a positive response). Therefore, social intelligence can be referred to as the skill required of prospective counselors to communicate with people, observe social settings and respond accordingly. It is the counselor's ability to relate, sustain and form interactions with fellow counselors, clients, and others; it is the ability to get along with others, and to get them to work together with one another. It is the capability to build positive social relationships and resolve conflicts, which are essential in counseling.

Individuals with high social intelligence are regarded for displaying behaviors or attitudes which make people around them feel respected, appreciated, capable, cherished and important. They are pleasing to people and are often called having a 'magnetic personality'. Conversely, some individuals with low social intelligence are labeled as 'toxic'; they may make others feel irritated, degraded, inadequate, frustrated, angry, and embarrassed (Azañedo, Sastre, Artola, Alvarado, & Jiménez-Blanco, 2020; Doğan & Çetin, 2008; Rahim, Civelek, & Liang, 2016).

Developing social intelligence is beneficial for improving one's social relationships as it allows one observe and comprehend others. Developing social intelligence offers various benefits in daily life. Having this skill allows one to avoid bad communication practices such as cutting others off, judging others hastily, speaking too fast. Rather, it will also make your personal and professional relationships more fluid.

In some cases, social intelligence enables individuals avoid complicated situations or defuse conflict (Hashem, 2021). Goswami (2018) considered social intelligence as the ability to understand people, social situations and social norms and to act in a socially acceptable manner. It consists of the aptitude to read and understand someone's conduct, behaviors, dispositions, feelings and body language; information of social

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norms and rules and socially suitable behavioral patterns in various settings; ability to connect with others and uphold friendly personal relationships and capability to control one's own behavior, attitudes and feelings, as per social situation.

The lack of social intelligence has been linked to numerous problems in people, e.g., demonstrating odd behaviors, lack of compassion, disturbing harmony and peace of the society and developing phobias to using communal rest room, meeting new people, having conversation with strangers. In recent times, a large number of workers have lost employments due to their lack of social intelligence. This is different from the past, when brilliant persons assumed they only had to be good at their jobs to protect their position in the workforce. Nevertheless, the new trend has made employees and their employers reexamine their approach to work. They have recognized the need to shift attention toward enhancing the organization by developing their social intelligence (Goswami, 2018).

For the past few decades, studies, mainly in corporate settings, have recognized social intelligence as a modality to help individuals become competent in their jobs and relate positively with others. Another finding in education setting revealed that students' assessments of their social intelligence, competencies, and beliefs may have an impact on their academic achievement (K. S. & Amalraj, 2019; Raj & Komalavalli, 2022). There are also claims that within organizations, the traits of social intelligence are just as vital as cognitive intelligence.

Currently, traditional conceptions of social intelligence have stressed high-road abilities like social knowledge, or the ability to recognize guidelines, procedures, and conventions that rule appropriate behavior in a particular social context. Social intelligence may have an important part to play in counselor training; this is because, a prospective counselor with high social intelligence may be in a better position to become a more competent professional (Obilor & Ikpa, 2019).

A counselor's social intelligence and personality are important in developing not only the outer self, but also the inner self. It helps prospective counselors develop discipline, self-confidence in social settings, confidence in expressing their feelings and emotions, ability to adjust, capacity to understand and respond to situations efficiently, genuine concerns for colleagues and a high level of self-awareness. It enables them to get along with their colleagues, sustain cordial relationships, be a good team player and work in harmony with others (Obilor & Ikpa, 2019).

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Those who intend to become professional counselors in the future ought to possess a number of attributes which should include social intelligence and personality characteristics to be able to support a counseling process. They need to recognize social settings and accomplish their intentions by using empathy. Social intelligence can reduce conflict, build teamwork, substitute intolerance and division with understanding, and assist individuals within a group to achieve common goals. Certainly, it may be the most significant component in our species (Albrecht, 2009), hence, counselor education programs should place huge emphasis on the development of positive social intelligence, which may serve as predictors of prospective counselors' competence. The demand for capable counselors in numerous places, has also placed additional pressure on the counseling education programs. It pressures counseling education institutions to conduct selection for prospective students with considerations of certain personality characteristics linked to success of the counselor career.

DiTommaso, Wheat, Minton, & Cochran (2022) investigated the degree that Big Five personality domains may predict the positive counselor qualities. Meanwhile, Birknerová, Frankovský, & Zbihlejová (2013) conducted studies on social intelligence in the context of personality traits of teachers, aiming to find out the relationship between social intelligence and personality traits. It is vital to note that a lot of empirical studies have been done to investigate various aspects of counseling, but not much has been done on social intelligence of prospective counselors in public universities in the states of Edo and Delta in Nigeria. Two public universities that offers guidance and counseling programs are involved in the study.

Rationale Of The Study

The emphasis of this study was to investigate social intelligence as a predictor of counseling competencies among prospective counselors. Prospective counselors are trained to carry out their duties competently, based on the skills, ethics governing the profession, and knowledge they have acquired during their course of training. Prospective counselors are expected to possess skills, knowledge, the right attitude and qualities of a competent counselor. It is not certain whether prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta who are likely to become professionals possess qualities that positively reflect their competencies. This is because prospective counselors might be confronted with some difficult situations, such as stress and burnout from the academic workload, financial problems, personal and family

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problems, lack of supervision which may result in them developing negative emotions and anxiety. A prospective counsellor whose inner life is in chaos or out of balance is not only going to be less helpful to others but also of introducing their unresolved problems in their relationships.

The lack of counselor attributes among prospective counselors may have dire consequences; e.g., incompetency, unethical conduct, lack of emotional intelligence consequently, they may not be able to make the desired positive impacts on the lives of their clients and the society once they become professional counselors. The success of the counseling profession will depend on the knowledge and attitude of prospective counselors who will eventually become professionals.

A study by Obiunu & Ozuri (2018) revealed that students complain that some professional counselors not exhibiting the expected attributes of effective counselors, hence students are afraid of seeking the assistance of a professional counselor to resolve their conflict. Similarly, Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong (2010) found that students do not reach out to counselor for assistance because of their incompetency; common problems among students such as cheating in tests, intimidation from fellow students, truancy, school indiscipline, poor performance in their academic, school unrest, alcohol and drug abuse, cultism, social discomfort, video game addiction, internet addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancies, may not prompt them to seek professional help in spite of the presence of counselors in the school. This could lead to bigger problems in the society if those issues are note resolved. Therefore, it would be worthwhile if prospective counselors possess the required attributes, to ensure that the goal of counseling is realized.

Literature Review

Sternberg (2002) asserted that career achievements are linked with three types of intelligence; creative, analytical, and practical. According to Sternberg, practical intelligence is similar to social intelligence. Other researchers have examined related concepts, such as intrapersonal (emotional) and interpersonal (social) intelligence (Gardner, 1999, 2011).

The lack of social intelligence has also been found to be connected with numerous problems in individuals, some of which include displays of strange behaviors, lack of empathy, disruptive behaviors (Joseph & Lakshmi, 2010); being "off", such as behaving cold, aloof, or abrasive when it comes to communication and relationships (Stichler,

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2007) and an increased likelihood of social phobias that may include avoiding speaking in public, sharing public bathroom, meeting new people, talking with strangers (Goleman, 2009).

Social intelligence can reduce clashes and put an end to prejudices and divisions (Joseph & Lakshmi, 2010). Kosmitzki & John (1993) described a socially intelligent person as an individual who can comprehend their thoughts, feelings and intentions; someone who is good at dealing with people, has extensive knowledge of the rules and norms in human relations, capable of taking the perspective of others, adapts well in social situations, warm and caring; an individual who is open to new experiences, ideas and values, respects human dignity and develops an unconditional love, a genuine and positive regard for others, performing duties for the common good, protecting human rights. The researchers, therefore, concluded that these should be the attributes of a competent prospective counselor.

According to Joseph & Lakshmi (2010), social intelligence makes room for social improvement and actions that seek to improve the well-being of humans, improve social culture, increase obligation made to others, and cause optimistic changes in society. It is in line with Saxena & Jain (2013), who stated that social intelligence helps people to develop the ability to live with others in a healthy manner. Cohen (2006) also proposed that social intelligence skills are opening for involvement in equality and general better-quality of life. This, therefore, implies that social intelligence is a vital quality that will enhance prospective counselors' competence.

Two constructs have been found to be strongly connected to social intelligence. Research by Meijs et al. (2010) discovered that intense peer status, as characterized by observed fame, was significantly interrelated to social intelligence. Ostberg (2003) found that high social intelligence predicts well-being, whereas students of low social intelligence have shown higher likelihood to develop behavior problems (Dodge & Pettit, 2003; Laird, Jordan, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2001).

According to Libbey (2004), academic performance improves when counselors feel connected to school including lecturers, fellow students, or the institution itself. Social intelligence has an important role in defining one's flexibility, according to Palucka, Celinski, Salmon, & Shermer (2011). Social intelligence is one of the main protective factors against high-risk behaviors, which include suicide. Social intelligence assists in

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adaptive functioning and effective negotiation of counselors' social world, eventually assisting the counselor to deal effectively with daily challenges.

According to Rahim (2014), social intelligence affects artistic and work routine of prospective counselors. Rahim's (2014) research on a section of top-management members discovered that counselors with higher social intelligence perform more efficiently. Another study proposed that social intelligence is a better predictor of work performance than other personality-related actions (Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2012).

Hooda, Sharma, & Yadava (2009) found that great level of social intelligence has positive psychological impact. In addition, these researchers established that someone can improve health by enhancing their social intelligence. It confirms that physical or general health is positively related to social intelligence, just as Wawra (2009) asserted that social intelligence is an essential, or rather satisfactory, attribute of a decent intercontinental communicator that increases positive and reduces negative emotions in social interactions.

Effective counseling skills are a key source of competence for prospective counselors (Falender & Shafranske, 2007). Counseling is an active practice which consists of an organized and systemic unit of client variables, counselor variables, and surrounding conditions (Henkelman & Paulson, 2006). De Stefano, Mann-Feder, & Gazzola (2010) piloted a qualitative study of accounts written by clients who took part in a counseling relationship. It revealed that those clients considered the interactive abilities and services of the counselor important in counseling effectiveness. Since individual clients have their opinion of the counseling experience, it is suggested to discuss the client's understanding of the procedure and in what way it aligns with their counseling's objective.

Silvera, Martinussen, & Dahl (2001) stated that social intelligence comprises of: 1) perceptiveness of the inner states and dispositions of other persons; 2) overall capacity to deal with other individuals; 3) understanding of social standards; 4) capacity to familiarize oneself with social situations; 5) use of social methods that permit influence; 6) social charisma and 7) social adaptation. According to Mahmud, Ishak, & Salleh (2005), counseling effectiveness can be assessed through conduct, opinions, and moods of the counselors, implying that the social intelligence of the prospective counselors has a large part to play in the development of their counseling competence and skills. The

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development of prospective counselor's social intelligence is vital for the society as a whole the reason is that it will increase their performance and counseling competencies.

Bennett (2015) conducted a study to compare the social intelligence of distance learning undergraduates and the social intelligence of traditional undergraduates at various grade levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), involving students aged 18-24. Extraversion, heartiness, social influence, social insight, social perceptiveness, social adequacy, and social adjustment were the seven factors of social intelligence extracted using factor analysis. The researcher conducted four analyses using 2 x 4, two-way analysis of variance. The first test measured the main effect of grades and learning environment, as well as the interaction between the two on social intelligence. Social intelligence was measured using the full 21 questions on the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale. Result showed no significant differences in the mean level of social intelligence between distance and traditional undergraduates, nor were there any significant differences between learning environments in social intelligence across grade levels. However, a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the mean level of social intelligence among undergraduate college students, based on grade levels, was found.

Alkhutaba (2022) carried out a study to explore social intelligence and general self-efficacy as predictors of public speaking skills among university students. The study involved 403 samples (216 male and 187 female) randomly selected from Isra University and the University of Jordan in Jordan. The findings revealed a higher influence of self-efficacy on students' public speaking skills than social intelligence. General self-efficacy and social intelligence showed a moderately significant association. Additionally, the findings revealed a positive but weak connection between general self-efficacy and public speaking skills. Also, the Pearson test detected a weak positive link between social intelligence and public speaking ability. Social intelligence and general self-efficacy were considered positive signs of their public speaking skills.

In a study carried out by Birknerová, Frankovský, & Zbihlejová (2013) on social intelligence looking at the personality traits of teachers, 522 teachers were involved. The major aim of this research was to examine the interrelationship between social intelligence and key personality traits of teachers and, on this basis, describe the role of social intelligence in the context of teachers' personality traits. It was found that the personality characteristics of teachers are connected to the factors of social intelligence. The study found that neuroticism reduces the level of social intelligence, mainly in social

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skills and social perceptiveness. Conversely, social intelligence strongly relates with extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness.

These are the personality attributes which are likable and preferred among teachers. Comparative analysis based on gender only found significant differences in it cognitive processing and emotional release between male and female teachers. As these types of attitudes were desired more in male teachers, the results correspond with the overall findings linked to gender difference. Social intelligence as a personality trait, as well as a performance attribute might be considered as significant social skill of the teaching profession and also as a significant predictor of effectiveness of a teacher in their profession (Birknerová, Frankovský, & Zbihlejová, 2013).

Research Gap

Birknerová, Frankovský, & Zbihlejová (2013) and Rathod (2017) carried out studies on social intelligence in the context of personality traits of teachers and adolescence. The studies mainly focused on personality as traits; however, literature reviewed by the researchers showed that not much has been done on social intelligence as predictors of counselor competencies of prospective counselors in public universities in the Edo and Delta. Therefore, this study would provide empirical evidence for predicting the success of prospective counselors in the counseling profession. Moreover, the present study made attempts to bridge the existing gap in research and knowledge on the social intelligence as predictors of counseling competency.

A study conducted by Obilor & Ikpa (2019) investigated social intelligence and academic achievement of senior secondary school students, which involved 240 students. The correlational employed structured questionnaire titled "Social Intelligence and Academic Achievement" (SIAAA), with a four-point rating scale and a reliability coefficient of 0.81. The study found that self-awareness, self-motivation, and empathy, enhance the academic achievement of students. It was recommended that teachers/instructors take into account their students' diverse self-awareness, self-motivation, and empathy in designing instructional methods. It was further recommended that teachers should help their students understand their various intellectual preferences and make use of such to develop life-long learning (Obilor & Ikpa, 2019**)**.

The review of literature showed that studies have been done to find out several predictors to the counseling competence of practicing/professional counselors

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(counselors on the field), e.g., their level of education, experience, age, personality traits. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there was a lack of information about social intelligence and personality characteristics as predictors of counseling competencies of prospective counselors (counselor-in-training) in public universities in Edo and Delta. This was the gap in literature this study intended to fill.

Problem Formulation

Research questions to the study are as follow: 1) What is the level of social intelligence of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta? 2) Does social intelligence predict counseling competencies of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta?

Purposes Of The Study

The main purpose of this study was to precisely examine the level of social intelligence among prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta, and to determine whether it predicts their counseling competencies.

Hypotheses Of The Study

The null hypothesis formulated was tested at 0.05 significance level: social intelligence does not significantly predict the counseling competencies of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta**.** Alternative hypothesis is social intelligence significantly predicts the counseling competencies of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta**.**

METHOD

Research Design

The survey research design was used for the study adopting the correlational approach. This research design is selected because it is a quantitative method of research that determines the relationship between two or more groups of variables.

Research Sample And Sampling Technique

The population of this study comprises of Master's degree students studying Guidance and Counseling or Counseling Psychology, in public universities in Edo and Delta for academic years of 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. At the time of the study, the students had done their practicum. The population comprises of 81 people and we recruited all of those students in the study.

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Table 1. Population Of The Study

No.	Name of School	Session	Number of Students at Masters (M.Ed) level
1	University of Benin	2021/2022	31
		2022/2023	17
2	Delta State University, Abraka	2021/2022	19
		2022/2023	14
	Total		81

Instruments Of Measurement

The instruments used in this study were: 1) Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSI), adapted from Silvera, Martinussen, & Dahl (2001) and 2) Counselor Competency Scale (CCS) adapted from the core counseling competencies developed by Counseling & Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA, 2014). Researchers adapted 20 of 21 items in the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale (TSI); the item which was not relevant to the study was removed. The Counselor Competency Questionnaire (CCQ) was modified to suit the purpose of the study.

The questionnaire is in three sections. *Section A* consists of personal data of the prospective counselors; this elicited information on prospective counselors' sex, age and qualifications. *Section B* is the Tromsø Social Intelligence scale, a self-report measure of social intelligence, adapted by the researchers, The Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale is a 5-point scale with alternative responses comprising of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). *Section C* is the Counselor Competency questionnaire, which comprehensively measures the competency of the prospective counselors. The Counselor Competence Questionnaire comprised of 30 items, assessing three dimensions of competence; i.e., knowledge, skills and behavior. Items 1-10 measure knowledge, items 11-20 measure skills, while items 21-30 measure behavior. The scale used a 4-point rating format with the following alternative responses: Very True (VT), Somewhat True (ST), Somewhat Untrue (SU), Very Untrue (VU).

These instruments underwent a comprehensive validation process involving expert judgment. Roebianto, Savitri, Aulia, Suciyana, & Mubarokah (2023) and DeVellis (2016) divulged that expert judgement is an enormous technique used in research, predominantly in assessing content validity and making decisions based on the knowledge and expertise of individuals who are considered experts in a particular

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domain. While it is a widely accepted method of validation process in research, the goal of expert judgment is to leverage the specialized knowledge and experience of experts to address complex issues, make informed decisions, and achieve desired outcomes (Omorogiuwa & Iro-Aghedo, 2016; DeVellis, 2016).

A panel of five experts with extensive experience and background in counseling psychology and psychometrics were selected to participate in the validation process. Each expert independently assessed the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the instrument items in relation to the intended construct. The expert judgment process involved structured assessments of the instruments by the panel members. Following each expert's assessment, consensus discussions were held to resolve any discrepancies and refine the instruments. The outcome of this process was consensus among the panel members regarding the content validity of the instruments. Feedback provided by the experts informed revisions to certain items to enhance their clarity and alignment with the construct being measured.

The consistency of the instruments was established using Cronbach's alpha after administering the them to 20 Master's students from the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counseling Psychology at the University of Benin. This was crucial as DeVellis (2016) and Tavakol & Dennick (2011) revealed that Cronbach's alpha, a commonly used statistic in psychology, education, and social sciences, assesses the internal consistency or reliability of scales or questionnaires. The value ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater consistency. Researchers utilized Cronbach's alpha to assess if scale items effectively measure the intended construct, and low alpha values may indicate the need for revisions (DeVellis, 2016). The reliability coefficients obtained for the social intelligence scale was 0.837. Meanwhile, knowledge, skills, and behavioral sub-scales of the counselor competence questionnaire showed alpha score of 0.810, 0.896, 0.796, respectively. Data implied that these instruments were reliable.

Data Analysis Technique

Descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, were employed to address research question 1, which aimed to determine the level of social intelligence among prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta. To aid interpretation, established score categories were utilized following the guidelines proposed by Owie (2013) and Omorogiuwa & Iro-Aghedo (2016): a) *high*, indicating

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scores significantly above the scale mean; b) *moderate*, representing scores close to the scale mean; and c) *low*, denoting scores significantly below the scale mean.

Additionally, hypothesis 1 was tested using regression analysis, practicum scores from schools were standardized for uniformity of measurement metrics. Omorogiuwa & Iro-Aghedo (2016) and Montgomery, Peck, & Vining (2012) affirmed that regression analysis is a complex statistical technique for modelling and investigating the relationship between two or more variables. Regression analysis is a reliable method of identifying which variables have impact on a topic of interest. The process of performing a regression allows you to confidently determine which factors matter most, which factors can be ignored, and how these factors influence each other (Fox, 2015; Harrell, 2015). The calculated mean from practicum scores and the mean from the counselor competency questionnaire was merged and became the composite score for the counselor competency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis Of Social Intelligence In Participants

Variable	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev	Scale Mean	Remarks
Social Intelligence	81	5267	65.03	9.29	60.00	High

Table 2 shows the descriptive data of participants' social intelligence. The mean value 65.03 is greater than the scale-mean of 60, implying that the level of social intelligence of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta was high.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	778.794	1	778.794	8.021	.000[b]
	Residual	7670.564	79	97.096		
	Total	8449.358	80			

α =.05; Adjusted R square=.081, R square= .092
a. Predictors: (Constant) Social intelligence
b. Dependent variable: Counseling Competency

Table 3 shows the simple linear regression analysis of social intelligence and counseling competencies. It was found that social intelligence significantly predicts counseling competencies of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and

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Delta (F=8.021, p< 0.01). An R-square value of 0.092 indicated that social intelligence predicted 9% of counseling competence of prospective counselors in these public universities.

Discussion

Findings from research revealed that social intelligence level of prospective counselors in public universities in Edo and Delta was high. Thus, this implies that they possessed social information processing, social skills and social awareness. They understand the thinking, feelings and behavior of others; they are conscious of relevant social situations, addresses challenges effectively, knowing what to communicate, when and how to communicate with people, and build and keep positive relations with others (Rahim, 2014). This finding is in line with that of Obilor & Ikpa (2019) and O'Brien & O'Hare (2007), who argued that individuals in counseling training courses possess high social intelligence.

The findings of the study also showed that social intelligence is a predictor of counseling competencies (F=8.021, p< 0.01, R^2=0.09). Therefore, counselor educators may consider assessing and developing social intelligence skills in their prospective counselors as a means to enhance their competencies in the field.

These findings align with the studies of Arora & Kaur (2018) who found a significant positive relationship between social intelligence and counseling competency. The finding of this present study is in line with Odaci, Değerli, & Bolat (2017) that social intelligence is a skill needed in counseling practice. It is also in line with Rahim (2014) who found that social intelligence predicts the artistic and work routine of prospective counselors. Emmerling & Boyatzis (2012) also found that social intelligence is a better predictor of work routine. These studies are also in line with studies of Sternberg (2002) who found that success in a career is connected with social intelligence. Birknerová, Frankovský, & Zbihlejová (2013) also established that social intelligence is a major predictor of the effectiveness of teachers. From the result of the findings, it can be concluded that for prospective counselors to be competent, they must possess these classes of abilities: 1) social skills, 2) situational awareness, 3) cognitive empathy and 4) situational response which are the sub-scale of social intelligence.

Social intelligence has an important role in the competencies of prospective counselors because it helps prospective counselors to navigate social interactions effectively, cooperate with others and build relationships. The competence needed by

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counselors is related with the understanding of social dynamics, ability to empathize with others, and the display of knowledge, skills and the required behavior of a counselor. Prospective counselors with higher levels of social intelligence tend to exhibit better interpersonal skills, empathy, and emotional regulation, which are essential for building rapport with clients, understanding their needs, and facilitating therapeutic change.

Brackett & Mayer (2003) suggested that social intelligence encompasses a range of abilities, including emotional perception, understanding, and regulation, as well as interpersonal skills. These abilities are closely related to core counseling competencies such as active listening, empathy, establishing trust, and maintaining therapeutic boundaries (Knapp & Fingerhut, 2024). Moreover, studies have shown that counselors with higher social intelligence are more adept at recognizing and appropriately responding to clients' emotional cues, facilitating effective communication and empathy (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Wyer, Jr. & Srull, 1989). This capacity for empathic attunement and interpersonal sensitivity enhances the therapeutic alliance, which is a crucial factor in counseling outcomes (Elliott, Bohart, Watson, & Murphy, 2018).

By understanding and responding sensitively to clients' emotions and interpersonal dynamics, counselors with higher social intelligence can create a safe and supportive environment conducive to therapeutic growth and change. Prospective counselors can benefit from developing their social intelligence alongside their counseling skills to enhance their effectiveness in supporting clients' mental health and well-being.

This study was limited to public universities in Edo and Delta. The researchers suggest that further studies could be carried out in undergraduate students in other fields of study such as social works and psychology. A study on counseling competencies of prospective counselors can be carried out on a larger scope, probably involving undergraduate students and a study on social intelligence of prospective counselors can also be carried out in other Nigerian universities from other states.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The researchers concluded that social intelligence is a significant predictor of counseling competencies of prospective counselors in public universities in the states

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Edo and Delta. This implies that for to perform their job competently, counselors must possess high social intelligence skills, which encompass 'social skills, situational awareness, cognitive empathy and situational response'.

Suggestions

Based on the results of this study, the researchers recommend that prospective counselors should be involved in adequate and appropriate simulation exercise required to instill high social intelligence, as it enhances their competence in counseling practice. Social intelligence should be incorporated into the postgraduate counseling curriculum as it has been proven to predict counseling competencies. It should also be incorporated into the admission tests for counseling programs to identify candidates with strong potential. Additionally, training modules or workshops should focus on enhancing social intelligence skills for current and prospective counselors.

Future researchers should ensure diverse and representative samples of prospective counselors to generalize findings across different demographic groups. There is also a need to investigate the specific components or dimensions of social intelligence that are most strongly associated with counselor competencies to provide more detailed insights. Also, longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine the development of social intelligence and its impact on counselor competencies over time. Researchers can explore potential moderating variables, such as cultural factors or educational backgrounds, that may influence the relationship between social intelligence and counselor competencies.

These findings can also help institutions better prepare counselors for their roles. The present study deepens our understanding of the relationship between social intelligence and counselor competencies, highlighting the need for prospective counselors to enhance skills in this area.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Edith Omorionmwen Omogbai: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Visualization; Writing Original Draft.

Wellington Omosefe Jesuorobo: Funding Acquisition; Project Administration; Validation; Writing, Review & Editing

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