

Perceptions and Unmet Expectations of Undergraduate Students on the Role of Counselling in Academic Achievement: Implication for Academic Development Program Review

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Abstract

This study aimed at evaluating the perceptions of students about the role of counselling and unmet expectation of undergraduate students. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The participants (N=150) recruited from first and second year students of Institute of Education in the University. Over 81% of students are aware of counselling services and affirm the relevance to academic achievement. However, 69% cannot affirm provision of roadshows to enhance awareness. The proportion of students disagreeing on provision of roadshows to enhance awareness may imply non-utilization of available academic development program and unmet counselling needs that calls for a review.

Keywords: academic achievement, academic development program, client perspective, counselling in higher education, roadshow advert

1. Introduction

Effective counselling programs for students are important in every school climate and constitute a crucial element in improving student achievement (Shaterloo & Mohammadyari, 2011). Counselling is an integral part of education and a continuous service that must be purposively both generalized and specialized (Shallcross, 2012). However, to maintain a proper counselling service, the client's perception is essential. In the health sector, it has been acknowledge that clients' attitudes to counselling relate to a range of factors, chief among them being individual perception (Risenga & Davhana-Maselesele, 2017).

This is an indication that student's perception of counselling roles is key to the program's long-term goals of helping to enhance academic achievement. As a matter of fact, if the perception of counseling is low or poor, it is likely to elicit negative response and result in a rejection of its programs. The opposite holds if their perception is high or good (Strowig & Sheets, 1967). It is common knowledge that expectations and perceptions differ between individuals, which has been noted to apply in counselling (Thomas, 2017). It has also been suggested that expectations and perceptions may differ with an individual or group of individuals, hence there may be no correlation relationship between perception of counselors and satisfaction with counselling (Heppner & Heesacker, 1983; Severinsen, 1966; Strowig & Sheets, 1967). Given that counseling is a psychological process of helping an individual to achieve self-direction or target, the definition of such target lies between the client and counsellor (Thomas, 2017).

In this era of student extremism, buoyed by questionable information on the internet, there is increasing pressure on school counselors to justify their relevance, including the adequacy of their programs (Akinboye, 1980; Yuksel-Sahin, 2012). In Africa including Nigeria, it has been sufficed that practice of counselling and guidance is incomparable with the way the services are practised in the Western world; and part of the reasons experiences of the clients as well as differences in the facilitating environment (Goss & Adebowale, 2014). Hence, it is safe to suggest that there may yet to be a model of evaluating the effectiveness of school counselling programs in Nigerian

institutions of higher learning. In other words, there could be a gap between knowledge of students' perception of counselling services, and whether the school counselling clients have unmet expectations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Academic development involves academic and professional staff in strategic activities that enhance learning and teaching in universities (Hunt & Chalmers, 2017). Counselling underpins the 'student support services' that have been adopted as an efficient academic mechanism all over the world. The primary purpose or business perspective may be student's retention and success, but the overarching concept is to utilize interpersonal relationships to achieve students' academic development (Devi, Devaki, Madhavan, & Saikumar, 2013). That is, there are various types of strategic supports rendered to enhance students' success (Midkiff & Grinage, 2017), counselling is one such activities. In order to achieve the target of academic development, it is supposed to put student learning and experience at its core (Hunt & Chalmers, 2017).

However, it has been indicated that the practice of counselling in Nigeria differs from the Western world due to several reasons that include facilitating environment and perception of the client (Goss & Adebowale, 2014). In a University with an established department of counselling psychology, a functional school counseling program/service is in existence as expected, but whether the counselling service is being voluntarily advertised to, and sought after by the students are unknown. Further, given that academic development involves academic and professional staff (Hunt & Chalmers, 2017), school counselling is supposed to involve the teachers (Lam & Hui, 2010), and enhance the student-teacher relationship. Guided by the knowledge that students' perception and utilization of counselling services are under-researched (Gaughf, Smith, & Williams, 2013), the perceptions of undergraduates regarding the role of counseling service and its perceived importance in their journey towards academic achievement vis-à-vis in achieving their academic development are also unknown.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) Do students in the University see counselling service as relevant in enhancing effective study skills?
- 2) Do students in the University perceive counselling as necessary in developing effective examination behavior?
- 3) Is there any difference in the perception of male and female students on the relevance of counselling in academic performance?
- 4) Are the counselling services available in the University proactively advertised?
- 5) Are the counselling services available in the University improving student-teacher relationship?

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population consisted of year one and year two undergraduate students of the Institute of Education in a University. A total of one hundred and fifty students (N = 150) were sampled using stratified sampling technique. The questionnaire used in collecting data include 16-questions excluding unidentifiable demographics information that constituted section A. Ten of the questions were on perception of relevance, which constituted section B. The other six questions surveyed the nature of services provided, including whether the counselling service providers were organizing roadshows to enhance awareness among students (Fig 1). In this study, roadshow is defined as meetings organized by counselling providers for the purpose of talking with client population or focus groups; both to create awareness and the palpate the clients' need.

The survey questions were formatted in table for responses to be on Likert scale, so that average score >3 was considered positive response. In addition, percentage of responses were also used for evaluation. Questions 1, 2, and 6 of questionnaire section B were used to answer research questions 1. Responses to B3 – B5 were analyzed to answer the second research questions. All questions were analyzed for third, while responses to C6 and B10 were analyzed for research questions fourth and fifth research questions, respectively.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Questionnaire on students' perception of counselling in academic achievement

Instruction: In each of the sections, please indicate your response against each statement by ticking in the appropriate column categorized into Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Unsure (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Do not mark more than one response for each statement. **The purpose of the instrument is for research only.** Therefore, feel free to respond honestly as all responses shall be kept highly confidential.

SECTION A: Demographic data

- 1) Sex: Female () Male ()
- 2) Age: 13-16 years () 17-20 years () 21 and above ()
- 3) Level: Year 1 () Year 2 ()

SECTION B: Perception on the relevance of counseling services

ITEMS		SA	A	U	D	SD
		4	3	2	1	0
1	I see CS as relevant in enhancing their study skills					
2	CS have helped improve my study skills					
3	I see CS as necessary in developing appropriate examination behavior					
4	Effective counseling helps in reducing examination malpractice					
5	Effective counseling helps me in good time management					
6	CS has led to my improved academic performance					
7	The female & male DELSU students see CS differently					
8	CS are more relevant for female students					
9	CS are more relevant for male students					
10	CS have led to better relationship with my lecturers					

Key: CS – counselling services

SECTION C: Nature of Counseling Services provided

ITEMS: DELSU counseling center...		SA	A	U	D	SD
		4	3	2	1	0
1	Provides educational counseling					
2	Provides personal-social counseling					
3	Organizes orientation programs for new students					
4	Organizes talk shows of educational nature*					
5	Provides individual services for students with special needs					
6	Organizes roadshows to enhance awareness among students					

*On effective study habits, time management, effective use of leisure, etc

Figure 1. The Questionnaire Survey Instrument

Descriptive statistics analysis performed were percentage frequencies and means to determine the perception of undergraduate students towards the role of guidance and counselling in academic achievement. MANOVA analysis was further carried out using SPSS version 11 to determine which factors were significantly important as regards the responses generated from the questionnaires. The demographic responses on ‘section A’ were rated for the subgroups – viz:

- Gender groups: Female (1), and Male (2),
- Study level groups: Year One (1), and Year Two (2),
- Stratified age-groups: 13-16 years (1), 17-20 years (2), and 21 and above (3)

3. Result

The 150 respondents comprised 86 females and 64 males. The year one students were 85, with the remaining 65 in second year level. The stratified age-groups have 62, 50 and 38 in the stratified age group 1st ≤16years old, 2nd 17 – 20years old and 3rd ≥21years groups respectively. Thus, the average age of study participants is in the range 17 – 20 years old; while a simple majority of the respondents are Year_1 students and females. Descriptive analysis of coded

data indicate that perceptions were generally on the affirmative (B1 – B6: averages ≈ 3), except for questions bordering on gender and student-lecturer relationship (B7 – B10: averages <2.0) (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Responses (N = 150)

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	C' Level
Age	1.84	2.00	1.00	0.80	0.30	0.13
Gender	1.43	1.00	1.00	0.50	0.30	0.08
S' Level	1.44	1.00	1.00	0.51	0.40	0.08
B1	3.53	4.00	4.00	0.76	-2.54	0.12
B2	3.26	3.00	4.00	1.00	-1.85	0.16
B3	3.15	3.00	3.00	0.92	-1.65	0.15
B4	2.70	3.00	3.00	1.26	-0.87	0.20
B5	2.88	3.00	3.00	1.21	-1.18	0.20
B6	2.53	3.00	3.00	1.34	-0.54	0.22
B7	1.85	1.00	1.00	1.45	0.15	0.23
B8	1.83	1.00	1.00	1.39	0.28	0.22
B9	1.53	1.00	1.00	1.34	0.56	0.22
B10	1.61	1.00	0.00	1.61	0.38	0.26
C1	3.10	3.00	4.00	1.16	-1.44	0.19
C2	2.82	3.00	3.00	1.20	-1.19	0.19
C3	2.94	3.00	3.00	1.21	-1.26	0.20
C4	2.29	3.00	3.00	1.45	-0.38	0.23
C5	1.92	1.00	1.00	1.42	0.23	0.23
C6	1.35	1.00	0.00	1.48	0.69	0.24

Keys: C' level: confidence level at 95%; SD: standard deviation; S' Level – students' study level

On analysis whether students of the University see counselling service as relevant in enhancing effective study skills; responses to questions B1, B2, and B6 on the questionnaire which are 3.53, 3.26, and 2.53 strongly suggests that on average students see counseling service as relevant in enhancing effective student skills (Table 1). Alternative evaluation in terms of percentage frequency of responses show amongst others that over 91% affirm the relevance of counselling to enhance their study skills and academic achievement (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of Responses Indicating Agreement to Each Question

SN	Questions	Agreed	%
B1	I see CS as relevant in enhancing their study skills	145	97
B2	CS have helped improve my study skills	136	91
B3	I see CS as necessary in developing appropriate examination behavior	136	91
B4	Effective counseling helps in reducing examination malpractice	112	75
B5	Effective counseling helps me in good time management	121	81
B6	CS has led to my improved academic performance	100	67
B7	The female & male DELSU students see CS differently	68	45
B8	CS are more relevant for female students	63	42
B9	CS are more relevant for male students	50	33
B10	CS have led to better relationship with my lecturers	60	40
C1	Provides educational counseling	127	85
C2	Provides personal-social counseling	121	81
C3	Organizes orientation programs for new students	123	82
C4	Organizes talk shows of educational nature*	91	61
C5	Provides individual services for students with special needs	66	44
C6	Organizes roadshows to enhance awareness among students	47	31

CS: counselling services

On evaluation of the 2nd research question on how students “perceive counselling as necessary in developing effective examination behavior”, result shows $\geq 75\%$ of the respondents agreed that counselling effective (Fig 2). The analysis of data for the 3rd research question involved all questions in the questionnaire – i.e. evaluation of differences between groups, result show variability in the questions where statistical significance is achieved. While significant differences in response to questions B10, C1, C2 and C6 are common to age and study level groups; C3 is common to study level and gender groups (Fig 3).

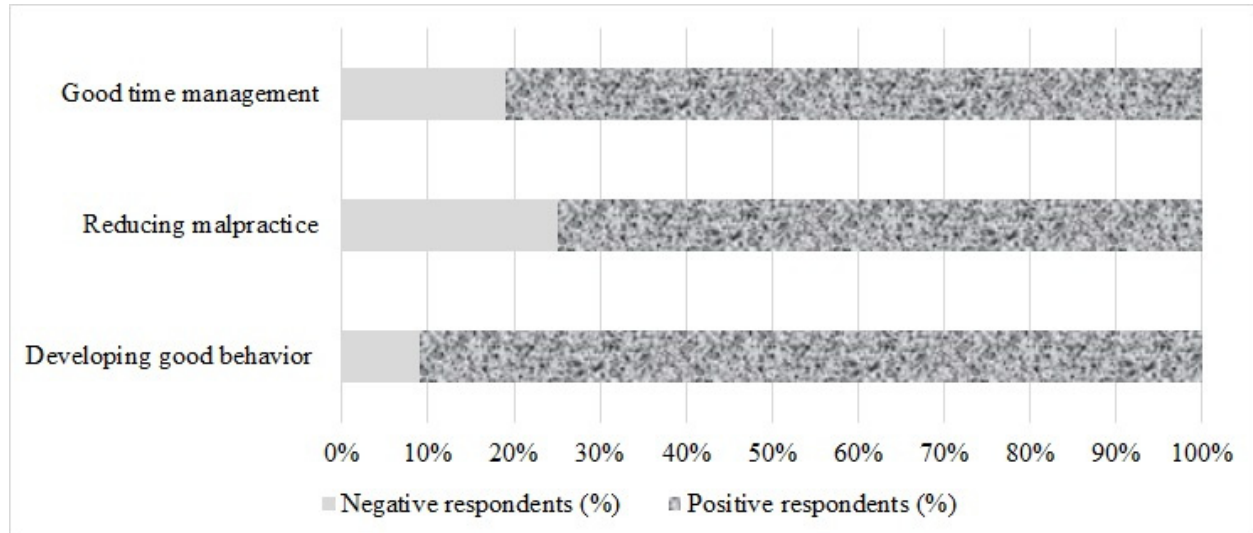


Figure 2. Perception of Counselling Effectiveness on Examination Behavior

Specific on provision of roadshows – i.e. the 4th research question, the mean value of responses to question C6 is 1.35, which indicates that the respondents disagree that the counselling center provides roadshows to enhance awareness among students. In terms of proportion, only 31% agree that the Counselling Centre in the university organizes roadshows (Table 2). MANOVA analysis on responses to question about roadshows, oldest students, by age and study level, are significantly unsure that roadshows are being organized, relative to other groups being emphatic disagreement (Fig 3; C6). Further MANOVA for evaluation of ‘perceptions of unmet expectations’ based on research question 5, MANOVA further shows significant differences in response to questions B10, C1, and C2 are common to age and study level groups, but not between gender groups ($p < 0.05$). The significant affirmative response to ‘better relationship with lecturers’ is not corroborated by the responses to the questions on provision of educational and personal-social counselling (Fig 3).

4. Discussion

As indicated on the statement of the problem, this study is based on the principle that academic development involves both the teaching and non-teaching (i.e. academic and professional) staff in strategic activities that enhance learning vis-a-vis put students’ perspective at its core. It is a given that counselling is one of such strategies. The study had set out to investigate whether students in the University perceive counselling service as relevant in achieving academic development; and if there is any difference in the perceptions of age, gender or study level groups. Further inquiry was to determine whether the counselling services available in the University are proactively advertised by roadshows; and improving student-teacher relationship. The observations from this study indicate that the students perceive counselling services as relevant in enhancing their effective study skills. Responses to questions B1 – B6 and C1 – C4 on the questionnaire are approximately 3 or higher (Table 1), which suggest that more than average of the students are aware and perceive counselling service as relevant in enhancing effective student skills. Most of the participants agree that the University’s counselling center provides educational services, personal social services, and organizes orientation programs for new students (Table 2). However, the mean value of responses to question C6 is 1.35, which indicates that on average, respondents disagree that the counselling center is making use of roadshows to advertise their services in order to enhance clients’ awareness. Thus, there are positive and negative highlights to the research questions.

First, the results indicate that students have a general high and positive perception on the role of counselling in academic achievement (Table 1). This slightly differs from the results shown by the study conducted at another Nigerian University that indicated a general low perception and all the variables except gender were found to be significant factors (Agi, 2014). The results of this study show differences between age groups, and that gender may be a significant factor that could influence some of the students' perception as indicated on the MANOVA analysis in B6 and C3 (Fig 2).

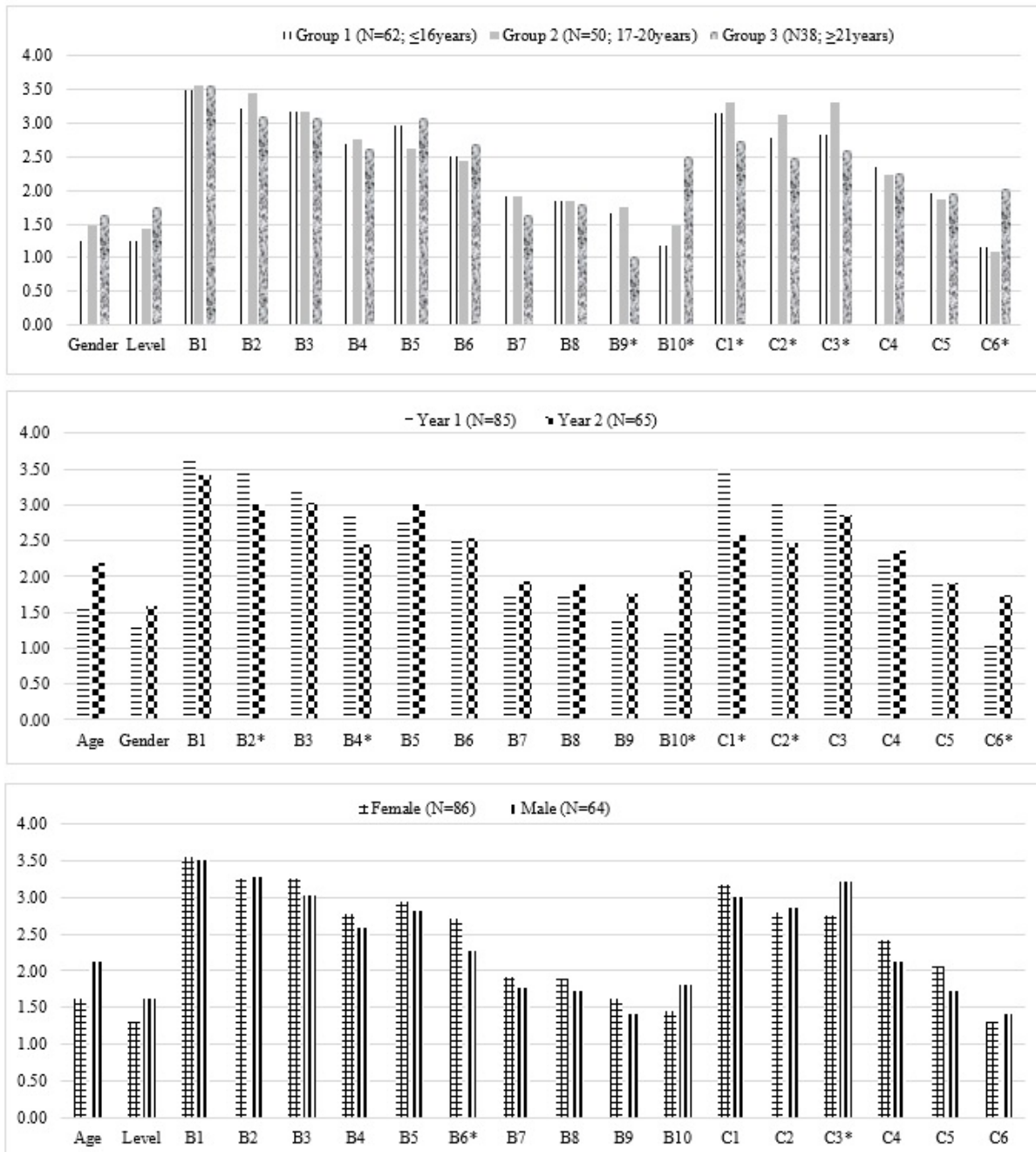


Figure 3. Comparison of Responses between Groups (*p < 0.05)

Second, the mean values of responses to questions B1, B2, and B6 on the questionnaire, which are approximately 3 or higher strongly suggests that *on average the students see counselling service as relevant in enhancing effective study skills*. Third, the MANOVA analysis shows that there is no significant difference to the responses of question

B1 whether in Age, Gender, or study level. This affirms that the students unanimously agree that counseling services are relevant in enhancing their study skills. Regarding whether the students perceive counseling as necessary in developing effective examination behavior, descriptive statistics show mean values of responses to questions B3, B4, and B5 to be approximately 3. That is, *on average the students also agree that counselling is necessary in developing effective examination behavior* (Fig 2).

Nevertheless, the fourth is negative. The findings show that the students disagreed that the counselling center organizes roadshows to enhance awareness of available services. On average, the 2nd year students appeared unsure, but the 1st year students' cohort significantly differed and really disagreed that there is any roadshow. Also, the oldest age-group appear to be unsure, while the others significantly disagreed. Both averages for female and male cohorts also disagreed (Fig 3). This could be translated to mean two things – viz:

- Firstly, some (31%) of the students are aware of roadshows as part of counselling centre activities. The implication is that the rest majority of students are just unaware.
- Secondly, 69% may be unaware and missing out on services being the counselling centre personnel, which would feedforward to clients' unmet needs.

This is a critical finding worthy of emphasis – i.e. that 69% students are unsure if the University Counselling center provides roadshows and talk shows of educational nature, and individual counseling for students with special needs. Recent study from Zimbabwe has indicated that students are aware of the availability of counselling services, but never benefitted from it. In particular, the report indicated gender differences on different conditions (Nkoma, Zirima, Mudhovozi, & Zhou, 2017). Yet, there is knowledge of gender-bias among counsellors, which had necessitated the call for training (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). It is important to note that knowledge of this bias may constitute a barrier to some students seeking the available services. Further, distance from the counselling center as well as stereotyping have been identified as potential factors that determine whether the students will utilize the service (Pickles et al., 2012). What these imply is that school counsellors such as in the universities need to review if their target clients are well reached. Perhaps, the academic development programs need to be reviewed.

Fifth and lastly, is the focus on academic success. In this study, only 60/150 (40%) respondents to 'question B10' agreed that counselling services improved their student-lecturer relationship. That is, 60% of the participants indicate that counselling services have not improved their relationships with the lecturers (Table 2). It is known that academic success largely depends on students' engagement with their lecturers (Abdel Meguid & Collins, 2017; Schmidt, Wagener, Smeets, Keemink, & van der Molen, 2015; Shernof et al., 2017). Therefore, this 60% of the respondents represents unmet expectations, which also constitute a clientele that should necessitate improvement academic development program of counselling services.

It is pertinent to restate the fact that academic development involves both academic and professional staff working together in strategic activities to enhance learning and teaching in universities (Hunt & Chalmers, 2017). The implication is that there is an obvious gap in knowledge and practice. Both non-teaching counsellors and the lecturers need to review the services available to improve their student-lecturer relationship – i.e. in the pursuit of enhancing the students' academic success. So far from this study, over 91% believe in counselling services for academic achievement, but less than half of the believers have seen improvement attributable to counselling. This is a real indication of unmet expectation. This is quite important as unmet expectations can affect both client and the consultant equally, especially causing the client's development of a negative perception about the consultant's services (Bell, Kravitz, Thom, Krupat, & Azari, 2002).

Further, in the context of 'knowledge, attitude and practice' gap, there is understanding that counselling in Africa is not as practiced in the Western world. We report high level of awareness of counselling services and the relevance to academic achievement. Nevertheless, majority of the survey population disagree on provision of roadshows to enhance awareness, implies much proportion of clientele not utilizing needed services that are available. This constitutes a gap between availability and awareness of services underlying unmet needs, which could be bridged by providers improving their awareness campaign.

5. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the University students have a high level of insight on the relevance of counselling in academic achievement. However, there is a cloud of hesitation among respondents as to whether the counselling center provides individual counselling services for students with special needs. There appears to be significant difference in the level of awareness of available academic development program of counselling between

stratified age-groups and study level subgroups. The 1st year and younger age-group students disagree that such services exist; while the 2nd and older students are unsure. It may benefit for University's counselling providers and lecturers to review their academic development program, with a view to improve awareness and erase elements of uncertainty among the students of the Institution.

Declaration of interest statement

Authors have no conflict or financial interest to declare

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