



# Effects of Counsellors' Skills in Test Administration on the Use of Psychological Tests in Secondary Schools in the South West Region of Cameroon

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the effect of counsellors' skills in test administration on the use of psychological tests in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The study was grounded in Harter's Competence Motivational Theory (1978) and Rogers' Person-Centered Theory (1967), which emphasize competence, rapport, and interpersonal relationships in professional practice. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted, involving quantitative and qualitative phases. The quantitative phase employed a quasi-experimental design, while qualitative data were used to corroborate and explain the quantitative findings. The population comprised school counsellors in public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. A sample of 56 counsellors was selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques from six public secondary schools in Fako, Meme, and Manyu Divisions. Participants were distributed into experimental and control groups. Data were collected using a questionnaire and an interview guide administered to chiefs of services for guidance and counselling. Both groups first undertook a pre-test assessing skills in test administration. Thereafter, the experimental group received a structured intervention on test administration skills for twelve weeks, with two one-hour sessions per week, while the control group received no intervention. A post-test was subsequently administered to both groups. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 28 with descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, standard deviations, independent sample t-tests, and Cohen's *d* effect size. Findings revealed statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups at the post-test level in favour of the experimental group. Results indicated that the experimental group obtained a higher mean score ( $M = 44.65$ ,  $SD = 14.343$ ) compared to the control group ( $M = 22.30$ ,  $SD = 7.371$ ), with  $t(56) = 6.198$ ,  $p < .000$ , and Cohen's  $d = 1.66$ , representing a very large effect size. The intervention therefore had a substantial positive effect on counsellors' skills in test administration. Qualitative findings further revealed that essential test administration skills include creating a conducive testing environment, establishing rapport with clients, being sensitive to clients' needs, obtaining informed consent, and providing clear instructions. The study concluded that counsellors' competence in test administration significantly enhances their ability to use psychological tests effectively in schools. The study therefore recommended the organisation of seminars and workshops to strengthen counsellors' competencies in psychological testing and improve counselling practice in secondary schools.

**INTRODUCTION**

Counsellors in secondary schools in Cameroon are charged with the duty of ensuring students' educational, vocational and personal-social development. However, for counsellors to effectively carry out these responsibilities adequate and comprehensive knowledge about the student is a necessity and one of the means through which this can be gotten is through the use of a psychological test. A psychological test is an instrument designed to measure unobserved constructs, also known as latent variables (Adebule et al., 2016). Latent variables are those qualities or characteristics in an individual that cannot be directly observed. This may include intelligence, aptitude, attitude, interest and personality tests etc.

A psychological test is an instrument at the disposal of a counsellor just as a laboratory and x-ray diagnosis is in the hands of a medical doctor. Counsellors use psychological tests in the same way medical doctors use laboratory tests, X-rays, and

physical exams, to determine the cause of health symptoms and recommend appropriate treatment. Psychological tests too are critical in counselling students because they provide objective, evidence-based insights into a student's cognitive abilities, personality, and emotional health (Adebule, et al., 2016). These tools enable counsellors to get a clear idea and proper evidence of the problem the client is struggling with and guides them in designing effective, personalized interventions and effective support strategies.

Section 42(1) of decree No. 2001/041 of 19 February 2001, outlining the duties of officials of the school administration states that guidance counsellors are responsible for counselling, information and orientation of students in accordance with their skills, interest and needs. Article 19 of this same decision stipulated that for counsellors to achieve this purpose, they need to make use of psychological tests. Section 42(2) equally states that the counselling service should use psychological tests to collect necessary information. This provision highlights the government's view on the

importance of psychological tests. Counsellors in secondary schools in Cameroon are trained on the use of psychological tests in Higher Teachers' Training Colleges.

Counselling is a life-changing process, the outcome of which may make or mar the life of an individual; hence it must be handled with care. There is no doubt that testing plays a pivotal role in the counselling profession. Wall (2004) expressed the view that basing judgments, decisions, and interventions specifically on information acquired in some systematic and objective way is of major importance in the life of a practicing counsellor. When a client is properly guided, using the necessary tools, they are not likely to make very many mistakes. Human behaviour is very intricate and complex and in dealing with clients such as students, counsellors need to use psychological tests so as to diagnose the accurate psychological conditions of the counselees and propose interventions (Daolu, 2003). The use of psychological tests however involves processes and procedures which only counsellors who are competent in administering them can use them without difficulties. Okoli (2000) asserted that only competent counsellors trained in test administration should administer psychological tests. Based on this the researcher sought to find out the extent to which school counsellors' skills in test administration affects their use of psychological tests.

### **Understanding skills in test administration and use of psychological tests**

Test administration is the process by which a test-taker completes a test (Griessel et al., 2009). Kahn (2001) refers to test administration as the process of managing and overseeing the delivery of a test to ensure standardised and fair conditions for all test-takers. This involves establishing and maintaining consistent procedures, monitoring the testing environment, and ensuring the integrity of the test. Test administration thus involves carefully following standard procedures so that the test is used in the manner specified by the test developers (APA, 2020). In administering a psychological test, the individual is given the test under the prescribed conditions stipulated in the test manual (Kolo, 2001). These prescribed conditions which ought to be followed during the process of administering the test, in addition to the prescribed format of scoring and interpretations are what make psychological tests objective and standardized instruments (AERA, 2014).

The administration of a psychological test is the most visible stage of psychological testing. Done well, it creates conditions under which a client can demonstrate their true abilities or characteristics. Done poorly, it introduces noise that can distort results. Psychological test administration is thus a critical step in the testing process since it significantly impacts the validity and reliability of the test results (Cohen, 2009). According to Cohen (2013), test users must possess the necessary

training and expertise to guarantee that the test is administered correctly and reliably.

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2010) notes that it is important the test administrator is well-trained and skilled to ensure that the test results are accurate and reliable. Given the need for the use of standardised procedures, any person administering psychological tests must be well-versed in standardized test administration protocols. They should possess the interpersonal skills necessary to build rapport with the individual being tested in order to foster cooperation and maximal effort during testing (Geisinger et al., 2013). Additionally, individuals administering tests should understand important psychometric properties, including validity and reliability, as well as factors that could emerge during testing to place either at risk. Valid test administration is essential for ensuring the test accurately measures what it is intended to measure. If the test is not administered correctly, the results may be distorted and not reflect the individual's true ability or characteristics. Counsellors in secondary schools in Cameroon are trained Higher Teachers Training colleges are offered a course in psychological testing aimed at helping them acquire skills in administering psychological tests to students during practice.

According to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing by the American Educational Research Association [AERA] (2014), test administrators must adhere to strong ethical standards, such as protecting test-takers' privacy and gaining informed consent. Worthen et al. (1993) suggest several guidelines for administering tests, including (a) checking the physical setting for appropriateness (e.g., adequate lighting, temperature); (b) insuring that participants know what they are supposed to do; (c) monitoring the test administration; and (d) following any standardized instructions carefully (e.g., as provided with a published test). According to the International Test Commission (ITC, 2011), psychological test administration involves various skillful activities, including setting up the testing environment, providing clear instructions to the test-taker, seeking clients consent and ensuring that the test is administered consistently and unbiased. These activities are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

### ***Prepare the testing environment***

Counsellors have the responsibility of ensuring that the room in which the test will be conducted is suitable and conducive for testing. Distracting conditions such as excessive noise, heat, cold, interruptions, glaring sunlight, overcrowding, inadequate ventilation, and so forth should be avoided. Suitable testing conditions, such as a quiet, well-lit, and distraction-free environment, are vital for maintaining focus and enabling fair testing (Urbina, 2004). This is so because the setting in which testing takes place has a direct and measurable impact on results. Noise, poor lighting, extreme temperatures, lack of privacy, or frequent interruptions can all interfere with a client's ability to concentrate and respond accurately.

A client who is distracted, uncomfortable, or feels observed may give shorter, less candid answers or withhold revealing truthful sides of themselves.

Also, as a general rule, the presence of anyone other than the counsellor and the client in the room where a test is being administered should not be allowed (Urbina, 2004). In secondary schools in Cameroon where the counseling office has more than 10 counsellors, the counsellor administering a test can take the client to a quiet corner within the campus to avoid distraction from colleagues. The presence of third parties poses the possibility of distracting from or even influencing the testing process and introduces an element that is inconsistent with standardized test administration and an additional unnecessary risk to test security. To prevent possible interruptions, it is customary to post a sign-which many test publishers freely provide-on the door of the examination room to alert passers-by that testing is in progress.

Notwithstanding, there may be special circumstances that require the observation of the testing process by others-for example students on internship. Ideally, such observations should be made from a room adjacent to the testing room, through a one-way mirror (Urbina, 2004). For students who may have difficulties communicating with the counsellor because of their tender ages or linguistic background, or because of a disability, the presence of a parent or an interpreter may be required in the testing room. In such situations, as well as in any other case in which special accommodations that may have a bearing on the interpretation of scores are made, the report of test results should note them.

### ***Build rapport with the client***

Once a conducive environment is created the next step is for counsellors to build rapport-a relationship based on trust and mutual understanding with the client. The relationship between the counsellor and the client taking the test has a significant effect on test results. Rapport refers to a relationship of trust, respect, and mutual understanding between a counsellor and the client. In counseling, rapport is documented as an important factor in achieving favorable outcomes as well as accurate testing results (Patterson et al., 2006). In test administration (and/or educational settings), the perceived warmth or aloofness of an evaluator/ examiner has been shown to impact client's engagement (Downer, 2007). Rapport needs to be established with clients prior to testing to ease anxiety and facilitate self-disclosure (Tippins et al., 2006).

Rapport is generally built through the use of several verbal and non-verbal behaviours, or tactics. Verbal tactics include, for example, establishing common ground, by which investigators discuss shared interests with clients, using similar language as the client (e.g. slang), and engaging in self-disclosure, where the investigator shares about themselves (Kelly et al., 2013). Examples of non-verbal rapport tactics include adopting

an empathetic demeanour by showing kindness and respect, warmth, smiling, shaking hands with the client upon meeting, leaning forward to demonstrate attentiveness and engaging in active listening through eye-contact, head nodding (Abbe & Brandon, 2014). Researchers have found that verbal behaviours, such as greetings, polite words, compliments, and lack of criticism, foster rapport with participants (Bronstein et al., 2012). Also, rapport can be established when the client understands why he/she is being tested, what the testing will entail, and how the results will be used. Thus school counsellors need to explain the importance of the test to the client prior to test administration as this will help build rapport. Knowing the importance of the test to them will make them cooperative. Sattler (2008) recommends explaining to children what they will be doing during testing and why they need to do it.

The establishment of rapport with the student may reduce anxiety, promotes honesty and transparency, elicit more self-disclosure, and may be important for gathering sensitive, valuable information from the student (Sattler & Ryan, 2009). When clients feel nervous, agitated, or uneasy they may have difficulties completing psychological tests due to overwhelming emotional distraction and reduced concentration. Failure to establish rapport could result in reduced effort from the client and thereby affect performance. Holbrook et al. (2003) argue that rapport reduces response bias by motivating respondents to engage more deeply with the testing process and give thoughtful, honest responses.

### ***Seek clients' consent***

Equally important during test administration is obtaining informed consent. Informed consent is the foundational ethical process of ensuring a client fully understands the psychological testing process before it begins. This is not just a formality, and certainly not just a signature on a form. Informed consent is the process of ensuring that a client fully understands what they are agreeing to before testing begins; that is why taking the test is important, how the data will be used, and what rights the clients hold throughout the process. Informed consent is a process by which a person voluntarily opts to participate in an activity after they have been fully informed of all what it entails, and all that they will be required to do to become a participant, and are fully aware of what will happen to their data (Coulson et al., 2002). Informed consent is the legal doctrine that every adult individual has the right to decide what can and cannot be done to his/her person; this is the issue of autonomy (Dunn, 2001). Informed consent in psychological testing involves ensuring that a client understands the nature of the test and voluntarily agrees to take the test-with full knowledge of all what is involved.

Standard 9.03 of the American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2017), specifically talks about informed consent in assessments, requiring

psychologists to use clear, understandable language when explaining the purpose, procedures, and intended use of results to clients. This requirement extends to testing done in person and through electronic means as well. It is important to note that, informed consent is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that begins at the first contact and is revisited and updated throughout the professional relationship. This means a client's understanding and agreement must be maintained, not just established at the start. The process thus extends beyond mere signing of a consent form and encompasses a dynamic and continuing exchange of information between the counsellor and the client (Pallodino, 2002). The core elements of informed consent include: telling the client about the purpose and nature of the test how test data will be used and who will have access to the results and why, telling clients' that participation is voluntary, and that they have the right to withdraw or refuse at any point without any penalty, inform clients about confidentiality of their results and its limits (Behrs & Gutheil, 2001; APA, 2017).

Ensuring clients understand and agree to the process before it begins is not just ethical protocol; it is a direct expression of respect for their autonomy and dignity. When done well, it is one of the most powerful tools for building trust and ensuring ethical practice in psychological testing. When done well, informed consent can contribute to better outcomes by setting realistic expectations and encouraging genuine engagement (Fisher, 2003). When clients feel they have been treated with transparency and respect from the start, they are more likely to participate openly and honestly-which directly improves the quality and accuracy of test data. Finally, informed consent procedures can reduce a client's anxiety by demystifying the therapeutic process.

### ***Provide clear instructions***

Beyond securing a suitable testing room, adequate preparation of the testing environment also involves following the test manual's instructions for administration, which are geared toward replicating the conditions under which the test was standardized as closely as possible (Urbina, 2004). The student being tested should also receive clear instructions as stipulated in the test manual and a chance to ask questions (Patel & Laher, 2011).

### ***Provide necessary materials to students***

Counsellors are expected to acquire all the necessary test materials (including any modified materials for those with special educational needs/disability) and ensuring an appropriate testing environment which will facilitate standardized assessment procedures (Anikweze, 2014). This generally means ensuring all clients who are to take the test are prepared according to their needs and given sufficient preparation.

### ***Be sensitive to clients' with special needs***

Another important skill in test administration is sensitivity to clients with (Gregory, 2015). Impairments in hearing, vision, speech, or motor control may seriously distort test results. If the counsellor does not recognize the physical disability responsible for the poor test performance, a subject may be branded as intellectually or emotionally impaired when, in fact, the essential problem is a sensory or motor disability. In the case of a student with a physical disability (for example visual impairment) school counsellors must consider reasonable accommodations such as ensuring test materials (for example, large print) and the test environment (for example lighting) are appropriate. The guidance counsellor should also identify and make appropriate accommodations for students who have highlighted hidden disabilities such as dyslexia (Gregory, 2004). For instance counsellors could incorporate appropriate briefing to minimise test taker anxiety and extra time for test takers with dyslexia where necessary.

In addition, as with any group of students, test takers will differ in terms of cultural background and expectations. Lack of sensitivity to these issues could easily lead to an underestimation of a student's latent ability and adversely impact the future motivation of a student arising from an unreliable assessment process that has been given too much credence (Butcher et al., 2000). Group differences in performance on psychometric tests may be due to factors such as socioeconomic status, ability, educational background, language (Urbina, 2004). It is important that prior to test administration guidance counsellors identify any accommodations which will mitigate any unfair adverse impact. Test users should ensure that students are able to take verbal tests in their native tongue if it is intended to make any inferences about general reasoning ability. It is important to note, that acquiring the tests in the appropriate language will not always negate group differences as the content, language and/or images used may not translate across cultures accordingly (Gregory, 2015). As such, it is important to ensure that during test administration those of different cultural backgrounds receive reasonable attention and are made feel comfortable and at ease.

### **Modes of administering psychological tests**

There are two broad modes of test administration: proctored modes and unproctored modes. The proctored modes of administration is the situation where testing is managed or supervised through direct human supervision during the test administration session (ITC, 2005). The unproctored mode of administration, on the other hand, is when tests are completed in open or controlled format and there was no human supervision present during the test administration session (ITC, 2005).

Mode of test administration also refers to the form of a test, that is, paper and pencil test or computer based test

(Patel & Laher, 2011). Paper-and-pencil tests are completed manually, that is they are administered and more often than not scored manually. Test used in counselling offices in Cameroon are paper-pencil tests. Alternatively, computer-based tests refer to assessments that are administered by computer in either a stand-alone or networked configuration, or by other technology gadgets connected to the Internet or the World Wide Web (Patel & Laher, 2011). Given the large numbers of individuals that often need to be tested, computers are increasingly being used for psychological testing. Generally, computerised tests are direct duplicates of paper-and-pencil tests in content, format and sequence, the only difference is the medium through which the tests are administered.

There are many advantages of using computerised tests. Computerised tests take less time to complete in comparison to paper-and-pencil tests. Standardisation of instructions is achieved, fewer assessment practitioners are needed and errors from inaccurate scoring can be limited (Davies et al., 2009). To Tippins et al. (2006) computerized tests enhance consistency and efficiency in delivery, provide consistent instructions and accurate timing.

According to Gregory (2007) scoring psychological tests by hand is monotonous, time consuming and error-prone but computer-based tests can be scored instantaneously with an effortless process compared to paper-and-pencil scoring. Computerised tests provide quick and precise scoring. Once the test taker has completed the test, the administrator can generate the results instantaneously and automatically (Tippins et al., 2006). Not only could a computer score tests but it could assist with the interpretation and writing of reports with precise recording and storing opportunity (Davies et al., 2009). In general when computer-based testing is used scoring errors are reduced and standardisation increased (Naglieri et al., 2004).

Computer tests also pose many challenges relating to issues such as technical hardware or software problems (Tippins, 2009), programme compatibility, the test takers' unease with computers, privacy issues and generic reports (Davies et al., 2009). Leeson (2009) presents some challenges related to computer-based testing such as the lack of familiarity with computers, computer anxiety, and screen legibility. In the case of Cameroon some of the challenges using computer-based tests may include: lack of computer knowledge, power failure, lack or poor internet connection.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of psychological tests, there remains a significant research gap concerning the use of psychological test by school counsellors in Cameroon. To address this gap, this study sought to examine whether training counsellors on how to administer psychological tests enhances their use of psychological tests. The study is out to answer the lone research question: What is the effect of counsellors' skill

in test administration on the use of psychological tests in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon? By conducting rigorous empirical research and utilizing mixed-methods approaches, this study aimed to generate actionable insights that could inform policy and practice aimed at promoting the use of psychological tests by school counsellors.

This study was informed by the Competence Motivational Theory (Harter, 1978) which rests on the assumption that people are attracted to participate in activities in which they feel competent or capable of doing. Specifically, people who perceive themselves as having high competence in an activity exhibit higher intrinsic motivation to participate in the activity. In relation to this study, counsellors who perceive themselves as being competent in administering a psychological test will be motivated to use of psychological tests. The person-centered theory by Carl Rogers was also found relevant for this study as it underscores the importance of rapport, empathy and unconditional positive regard during test administration. For effective administration of psychological tests, counsellors must ensure that counselling skills such as genuineness, unconditional positive regard, rapport building and empathy are implicated in the testing process to reduce client's anxiety and tension, be comfortable and willing to provide honest and truthful responses.

## Review of Related Literature

Many empirical studies have established a connection between skills in test administration and the use of psychological tests. A study by Frost et al. (2015) on the effect of establishing rapport with test administrator in both online and in-person testing procedures in Ontario revealed that rapport building during test administration, helps in reducing client's anxiety and promoted self-disclosure. Drasgow (2004) in a laboratory and field studies comparing proctored testing to unproctored internet testing session, found that students performed better in the proctored setting than in the unproctored setting. By implication, counsellors' presence and supervision is essential during testing.

Mead and Drasgow (1993) carried out a meta-analysis on the effect of test administration (paper-pencil versus computerized) on timed power and speed cognitive ability tests. 123 correlations for timed power tests and 36 from speed tests were metaanalyzed. The corrected cross-mode correlation was .91 when all tests (speed and power) were analyzed together. Speed moderated the effects of administration and it was 0.97 for timed power tests and .72 for speed tests. In addition to the pencil-paper and computerized versions, the computer adaptive and standard computerized versions of the tests were equivalent. Using a South African sample, Kriek and Joubert (2007) compared online unproctored test to proctored paper-pencil version of the same test, the OPQ32i. The sample group of unproctored online ( $n = 1091$ ) and proctored paper-pencil ( $n = 1136$ ) was taken

from real job applicants who tested for various positions in different industries. They found very small to medium mean scale differences (Cohen's  $d$ ) ranging from .01 to -.57, thus concluding equivalence between the two modes of tests administrations.

Mackin et al., (2025) conducted a study on test taking location and practice effects as factors contributing to scores on remotely administered neurocognitive performance tests in a sample of older adults. The goals were to evaluate the association of test taking location (clinic, home) with remotely administered, unsupervised computerized test performance in older adults and to examine practice effects for these tests. Additionally, they evaluated the association of computerized test performance with performance on traditional neuropsychological tests. Findings revealed that participants tested in their home environment performed worse than those tested in the test clinic. Many distractions may exist in a home environment influencing the scores negatively, such as uncontrollable background noise, distractions from home care assistance and so forth.

Overton et al., (2016) in a longitudinal study examined the effect of test administrator effects on test performance. The specific aim was to examine the extent of potential test administrator influence on participant's test scores. Results showed a significant amount of test administrator influence on participant's test scores. That is students' test scores were influenced by factors such as the test version, test order, time of day and testing setting or environment.

### Statement of the Problem

Psychological tests are crucial in counselling as they give a breadth of information in a fairly short duration of time regarding numerous facets of a person's life, including their overall cognitive ability, personal behaviours, traits, and personality functioning (Gregory, 2015). The data obtained through psychological testing give both the client and the clinician insight into the client's world through their unique perspective, aiding in diagnosis, treatment planning, and tracking progress (Morouf, 2023). They provide objective data, enhancing the understanding of a client's strengths, weaknesses, and underlying issues, leading to more personalised and effective interventions.

Trained counsellors are expected to make use of psychological test in their professional practice. The mission of guidance counsellors is spelt out in article 4 of the ministerial order No= 67/B1/1464/ MINEDUC/CAB of February 2013, and calls on school counsellors to use psychological test to collect adequate information about students in order to be able to promote students' academic, vocational and personal/social development. However, this is not the case with counsellors in the South West Region of Cameroon as a handful of them do not use psychological tests. To use psychological

test, the counsellors need to be knowledgeable on tests, how to select, administer, score and interpret tests.

Despite the fact that school counsellors in the course of training are trained on psychological testing, very few of these counsellors use psychological tests. Looking at the school milieu, a lot is happening through orientation, counselling, referrals yet a large number of students still face career and social problems such as wrong series choices, poor school adaptation, poor interpersonal relationships, drug abuse and violence. Without the use of psychological tests, students' problems cannot be effectively diagnosed and resolved. These may lead to poor academic achievement, lack of employment, job dissatisfaction, poor interpersonal relationships, dismissal and school dropout thus constituting wastage in our educational system. Due to this, the researcher decided to examine if the non-use of psychological test is because counsellors' lack the skills to administer the tests.

### METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods approach specifically the sequential explanatory design whereby quantitative data was collected first followed by the collection of qualitative data. The sample comprised of 56 school counsellors from secondary schools in Fako, Meme and Manyu Divisions in the South West Region of Cameroon. The participants were selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques from public secondary schools in Fako, Meme and Manyu Divisions in the South West Region of Cameroon. The research instrument used to collect quantitative data was a Likert scale questionnaire for school counsellors while to collect qualitative data an interview guide was used for chiefs of services for guidance and counselling. Data was collected for a period of 12 weeks through pre-test and post-test procedures. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics where means, standard deviation, maximum, minimum, standard error of mean and Cohen's  $d$  were used. With respect to inferential statistics the independent sample t-test was used to compare the means between the two groups (experimental and control) as well as to establish the degree to which counsellors' use of psychological tests is dependent on their skills in test administration in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. On the other hand, qualitative data was presented using content thematic analysis.

### FINDINGS

The findings on the effect of counsellors' skills in tests administration on the use of psychological tests were evaluated before and after intervention and presented as follows:

**Table 1:** Comparing counsellors' skills in test administration at the pretest level for both groups without intervention

Pretest	Pretest control group	Pretest experimental group	Mean difference
N	48	48	
Mean	15.55	12.45	-3.1
Minimum	11	2	
Maximum	21	27	
Std. Error of Mean	0.800	1.775	
Std. Deviation	3.576	7.937	

Findings revealed that at the pretest level where participants in both groups were not provided an intervention on skills in test administration, counsellors' skills in test administration were almost the same as revealed by an approximate mean score of the experimental group ( $12.45 \pm 1.775$ ) and the control group ( $15.55 \pm 0.800$ ). The low mean difference between the

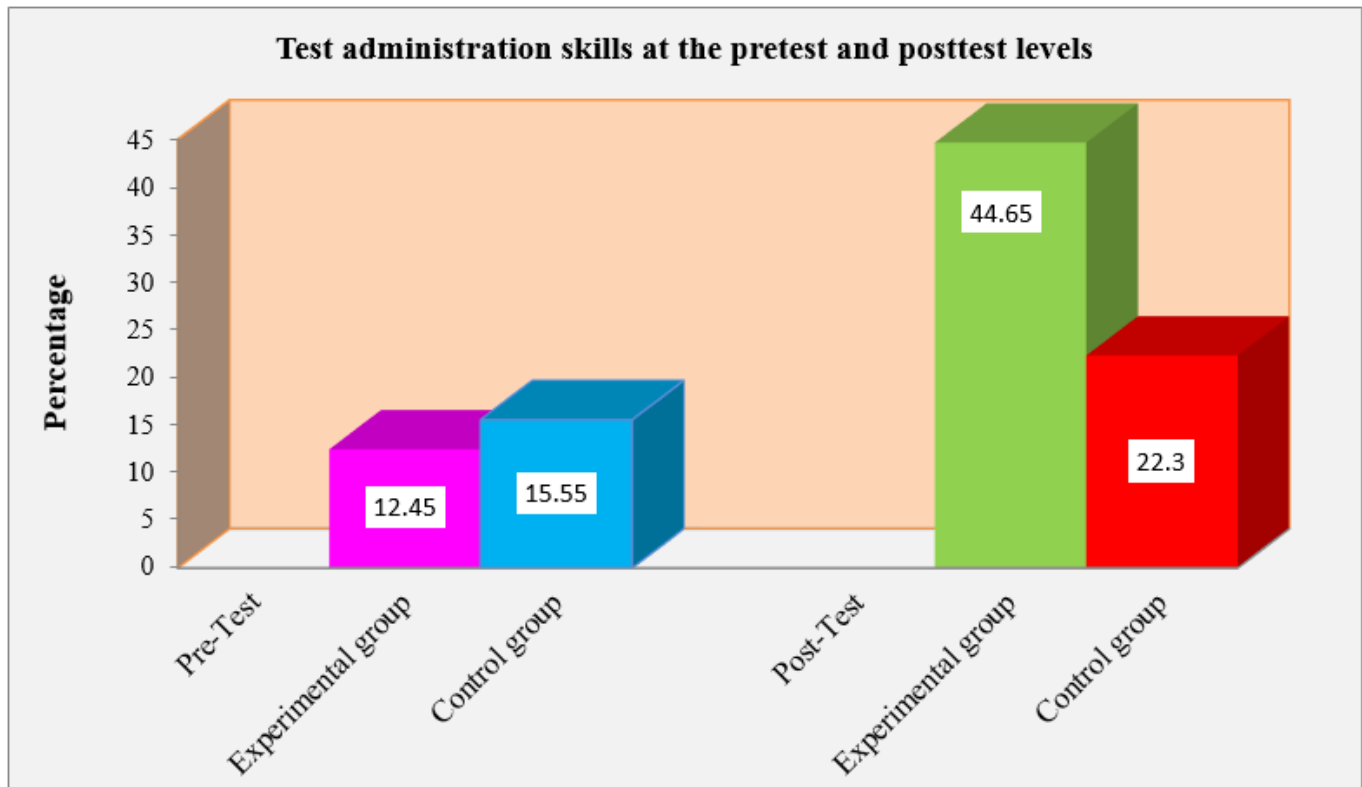
two groups means that both groups share a similar starting baseline regarding skills in test administration. The low standard error of means for both the control group (0.800) and experimental groups (1.775) implies that counsellors in both groups did not differ in the skills they possessed. That is, the counsellors in both groups did not differ significantly in their test administration skills.

**Table 2:** Comparing counsellors' skills in test administration at the posttest level for both groups after intervention

Protest	Protest control group	Protest experimental group	Mean difference
N	48	48	
Mean	22.30	44.65	22.35
Minimum	11	20	
Maximum	40	70	
Std. Error of Mean	1.648	3.207	
Std. Deviation	7.371	14.343	

Findings showed that at the posttest level where participants in the experimental group were provided intervention on test administration, their skills in test administration improved. This is indicated by a higher and increase in mean value from  $12.45 \pm 1.775$  observed at the pretest level to  $44.65 \pm 3.207$  at the post test when compared to participants in the control group who did not receive intervention with a mean of  $22.30 \pm 1.648$  which is

not too different at the pretest level (15.55). By this, it was evident that there was much improvement in counsellors' skills in test administration at the posttest level for those in experimental group than those in the control group. This is an indication that the training counsellors in test administration to a great extent have an effect on use of psychological tests. Below is a diagrammatic appreciation of this finding.



**Figure 1:** Counsellors' skills in test administration before and after the intervention

As indicated on figure 1, generally, counsellors' skills on psychological tests administration improved at the posttest as compared to their pretest results. The average score for the experimental group for the post-test was 44.65, an improvement from an average score of 12.45 in the pre-test. The mean difference of 32.20 indicates a significant improvement on counsellors' skill in test administration. For the control group, the mean score of 15.55 for the pre-test was not very different from their post-test mean score of 22.3.

The effect of counsellors' test administration skills on the use of psychological test was further investigated by interviewing the chief of services for counselling. The chief of services for counselling were asked to give some of the skills to be employed by counsellors in the course of test administration. Some of skills reported included: preparing the test environment as well as the client, creating rapport with students, seek client's permission, give clients' pre knowledge and clear instructions about the test.

#### **Prepare the test environment and students**

Participants reported that in the course of tests administration, counsellors' are expected to prepare the test environment and ensuring that students have the needed writing material such as a pencil to take the test. This was captured in the following responses of the counsellors: "Counsellors must first ensure the environment or office is free from noise and other distractions like from colleagues before administering a

test. This is very important because if the student is distracted, the scores maybe false." (Counsellor 1) Correspondingly, counsellor 2 said: "I think the counsellor should provide a quiet space for the students to sit and take the test and also ensure that the students have writing materials such as pencils to complete the test." In the same light, counsellor 3 added that: "The counsellors are expected to ensure that the environment is comfortable and also ensure that the student is relaxed before administering the test. They should remove every form of distraction such as noise and any other thing within the environment that may distract the student."

#### **Create rapport**

Also, it was reported that another skill needed for test administration is the creation of rapport. Rapport creation is important to build trust, reduce clients' anxiety, and motivate clients to provide more accurate, reliable, and valid information needed. Good rapport is associated with fewer missing responses, better engagement with test items, and more honest, and concise answers.

Captured in the words of counsellor 1: "Counsellors' are expected to create rapport with clients before administering a psychological test for this will help the client feel comfortable completing the instrument and provide honest responses." This was also echoed in the voices of counsellor 1 and 2: "Test administration depends on proper rapport creation. When there is rapport between the client and the counsellor, the

student will feel free to reveal truthful information about themselves.”

### Obtain clients' permission

It was also revealed that seeking clients' consent is another important skill for test administration given that this will determine how they respond to the test items. Captured in the words of counsellor 1 and 3: “The counsellor needs to seek students' permission before administering a test because if they are not willing to take the test, they may not give correct responses.”

Similarly, counsellor 2 held that: “Counsellors are expected to gain clients cooperation before testing; they should be willing to take the test and not forced if not they will hide certain aspects about themselves.” Correspondingly, another respondent intimated: “Counsellors should ensure that students know why they are being tested and how the results will be used. With this the students will trust them and will provide the information demanded by the test.” (Counsellor 3)

### Giving students' pre-knowledge about the test

Findings also revealed that giving students' pre-knowledge about the test such as its benefits and why it is important for them to take that test is another skill in test administration. Students' need background knowledge about the test so as to motivate them to take the test. This is depicted in the following typical responses: “The counsellor needs to understand the test well and explain the benefits or consequences taking or not taking the test accurately before administering the test to the students. This is because this will motivate

them to be serious and take their time in completing the test.” (Counsellor 1, 3) In support of this, counsellor 2 and 3 said: “Counsellors need to convince students why it is imperative for them to take this. This will enable them to gain the students' cooperation if not the students will just tick anything that comes to mind without being fully engaged and when this happens the diagnosis may be faulty.”

### Give clear instructions

In addition, findings also revealed that one important skill in test administration is the provision of clear instructions. Counsellors in the course of test administration need to give clear and concise instructions as stipulated in the test manual. Without clear instructions, students will not be able to complete the test also. This was captured in the following typical responses: “Counsellors should be able to give clear instructions to help demystify the test presented to the student. Failure to do so may lead to faulty diagnosis.” (Counsellor: 1, 2)

Similarly another respondent intimated: “Counsellors need to give clear guidelines about the test prior to its administration. This is to ensure that students follow these guidelines. Not following guidelines for proper test administration can have significant consequences such as wrong results.” (Counsellor: 3)

**Verification of hypothesis (Ho):** Counsellors' skill in tests administration has no significant effect on the use of psychological tests.

The statistical analysis technique used to test this hypothesis was the independent t-test. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

**Table 3: Effect of counsellors' skill in test administration on the use of psychological test**

Test level	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean	t-test value	p-value	Cohen's d (Effect size)
Post test	Experimental	28	44.65	14.343	3.207	6.198	.000	1.66
	Control	28	22.30	7.371	1.648			

\* $P < 0.05$ ,  $df(n-2) = 54$ , Critical  $T_{xy} = 2.04$ , mean difference = 22.35, Std. Error Difference = 1.559

Statistically, a verification of the hypotheses revealed that the intervention on test administration has a very large and strong significant effect (Cohen's  $d = 1.66$ ) on the use of psychological tests as indicated by a t-value of 6.198 which is higher than the critical t-value of 2.04 at  $P = 0.05$  with 54 degrees of freedom. Also the significance or p-value = .000 is less than predetermined alpha = 0.05 and the effect size, as measured by Cohen's  $d$ , was calculated to be 1.66, which is considered a very large effect. Hence, it was proven that skill in test administration is an important competence for using psychological tests. The difference in skills in test administration after the intervention indicates that organizing seminars and workshops to train school

counsellors on how to administer psychological tests will have a large and noticeable effect on the use of psychological tests by school counsellors. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that states that counsellors' skills in test administration have a significant effect on the use of psychological tests in the South West Region of Cameroon was retained.

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings revealed that counsellors' skill in test administration has a large effect on the use of

psychological tests in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. Skills in test administration will help the counsellor in ensuring that ethical guidelines and professional standards are followed when administering tests, ensuring fairness, validity, cultural sensitivity leading to effective counselling. Conversely, a lack of skills in test administration can result in misinterpretations, inappropriate diagnoses, and ineffective treatment plans. Hence for counsellors to use psychological tests, they need to be competent in following test administration protocols. This is in synergy with the American Counseling Association [ACA] (2014) and the American Psychological Association [APA] (2017) that a psychological test administrator must possess the necessary training and expertise to guarantee that the test is administered correctly and reliably. This entails creating a testing environment that is as friendly to the test-taker as possible, giving clear instructions, and ensuring the test is given consistently and impartially.

The implication here is that, counsellors' possession of test administration skills such as informed consent, rapport creation, preparing the student as well as the test environment will ensure the proper use of test and also ensure that test results are valid. Counsellors are expected to follow all the test guidelines in the manual and also try to ensure that students follow them to the latter. This finding is in line with the view of Griessel et al., (2009) that an essential component of testing is that counsellors must be intimately familiar with the materials and directions before administration begins. A well-prepared counselor has memorized key elements of verbal instructions and is ready to handle the unexpected.

The finding is also supported by the competence motivation theory (CMT) by Harter (1978) which posits that people will perform certain activities only if they feel they have the necessary competencies in performing those activities. The central thesis of the theory is that individuals are attracted to participation in activities at which they feel competent or capable. By implication, counsellors will make use of test if they are capable of administering the test. School counsellors who evaluate that they have all what it takes to successfully administer a test from the beginning to the end will be motivated to use a psychological test in the course of practice while one who feels they lack what it takes to administer the test will avoid make use of a psychological test.

The finding is also supported by the person-centred theory (Rogers, 1967) who posited that the first step in working with a client is the establishment of a psychological contact also known as rapport. There must be a relationship in which two people are capable of having some impact on each other. It deals with the therapist not just being in the same room with the client but also bringing forth his/her abilities to attend to and be engaged with the client. Rapport according to Rogers will enable clients to trust the counsellor and reveal their psychological state in the course of testing. When there

is rapport during test administration, clients will freely provide details needed about themselves.

## Recommendations

Findings reveal that counsellors' skill in test administration has an effect on the use of psychological tests. Thus, it is recommended that capacity building opportunities such as seminars and workshops should be provided termly for school counsellors to train them on how to administer psychological tests. School counsellors should also ensure that there is limited distraction from colleagues in the office in the course of test administration so as not to interfere with test results. The Ministry of Secondary education should also provide school counsellors with an enabling environment such as a spacious office with a psychological test room for effective test administration.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of counsellors' skills in test administration on the use of psychological tests in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases revealed that counsellors' competence in test administration significantly influences their effective use of psychological tests in counselling practice. The intervention provided to counsellors in the experimental group resulted in substantial improvement in their test administration skills, as evidenced by the high post-test mean scores and the statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The very large effect size further confirmed that training in test administration considerably enhances counsellors' capacity and willingness to use psychological tests in schools (Harter, 1978; APA, 2020).

The study equally demonstrated that effective psychological testing goes beyond merely administering instruments; it requires specialised professional skills such as preparing a conducive testing environment, building rapport with students, obtaining informed consent, giving clear instructions, and being sensitive to students' individual and cultural needs. These competencies contribute to the validity, reliability, and ethical administration of psychological tests, thereby improving the accuracy of diagnosis and intervention in counselling services. The qualitative findings further highlighted that when counsellors establish trust, transparency, and professionalism during testing, students are more likely to provide honest and meaningful responses (Urbina, 2004; Gregory, 2015; APA, 2017).

The findings equally support previous empirical studies which established that rapport building, proper supervision, and adherence to standardised testing

procedures enhance the quality and effectiveness of psychological testing (Frost et al., 2015; Drasgow, 2004; Mead & Drasgow, 1993). Counsellors who possess the required skills are more capable of creating conditions that encourage students to respond sincerely and attentively during testing, thereby improving the reliability and usefulness of test results. Theoretically, the findings validate the assumptions of the Competence Motivational Theory and the Person-Centered Theory, which emphasise that individuals are more motivated to engage in tasks when they perceive themselves as competent and when supportive interpersonal relationships are established (Harter, 1978; Rogers, 1967). In the context of this study, counsellors who possess adequate skills in test administration are more confident and motivated to use psychological tests in addressing students' educational, vocational, and psychosocial challenges.

Overall, the study concludes that strengthening counsellors' professional competence in psychological test administration is essential for improving counselling services in secondary schools in Cameroon. Enhancing counsellors' training through seminars, workshops, and continuous professional development programmes will not only improve the use of psychological tests but also contribute significantly to better student diagnosis, guidance, adjustment, career orientation, and psychosocial wellbeing in schools (ACA, 2014; APA, 2017).

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