STUDENTS' NEED FOR, AWARENESS, PERCEPTION AND USE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research investigated students' needs, awareness, perception and use of Guidance and Counselling Services (G&CS) in Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB). Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 283 respondents across the ten (10) colleges in the institution. Data were collected with the aid of questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, and mean. The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot study that revealed psychometric properties of Cronbach's Apha 0.86. Result revealed that 91.1% of the respondents were aware of G&CS and 74.6% of the respondents currently using the services indicated that it was very helpful. The rating of the counselling needs of the respondents revealed that academic issues with a mean of 3.62 ranked first, and exam pressure management had a mean of 3.51 ranked second. Furthermore, the rating of the perception of students on the quality and effectiveness of G&CS indicated that organized orientation services for fresh students ranked first (mean = 2.55), while effective counselling on personal, social, academic and vocational challenges ranked second (mean = 2.49). The study concluded that the G&CS needs of the students across the colleges differ due to the dissimilarities in their disciplines across the University. The G&CS was assisting students to attain competencies needed to overcome academic, career and personal concerns. The fresher's orientation service received the highest perception (mean = 2.55) among respondents on the quality and effectiveness of G&CS in the institution.
Keywords: *student needs, student awareness, student perception, guidance and counselling.*

Introduction

Guidance and counselling is a professional field, which has a broad range of activities and services aimed at assisting individuals in institutions of learning to understand themselves, their problems, their school environment and their world (Egbochuku, 2008; Oniye & Alawaye 2008; Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2010; Lunenburg, 2010). Oniye and Alawaye (2008) submitted that the development of effective study habits in relation to how people can utilize their assets and manage their abilities for optimal development is essential guidance and counselling services (G&CS). In relation to this, Idowu and Adeoye (1990) viewed guidance and counselling as a process of planned intervention within a school system by which the total development of students is stimulated in areas relating to their personal, social, career, emotional and academic concerns.

Effective counselling services assist, particularly university undergraduate students individually or in groups to develop competencies that help them adjust to different situations and make appropriate decisions in life. Mutie and Ndambuki (2011) noted that there is growing complexity in education, vocational and social structures in contemporary societies, hence the

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need for G&CS. An effective counsellor not only conveys accurate empathy, but also recognizes whether the empathic responses will indeed be experienced as accurate by the client. Research has demonstrated that empathy increases when counsellors modify their empathic response style to fit the client's definition of helpful, empathic responses (Lambert & Barley, 2001); the ability to do so corresponds to counsellor sensitivity to individual and cultural differences, which is also a determinant of a quality therapeutic relationship and effective counselling (Sperry, Carlson, & Kjos, 2003).

Counselling affords opportunity for significant personal growth and decision making regarding one's values, interpersonal relationships, career and other life goals all within a stressful student academic environment. The problems often encountered by undergraduate students include: academics, interpersonal relationships, sexuality, family problems, financial challenges, self-identify, loneliness, self-esteem and depression or anxiety (Nyaga, Oundo, & Kamoyo, 2014). In higher education, guidance and counselling is not a new phenomenon as students have always had problems for which they need counselling services. In most cases students are in need of academic advice and career guidance. These services have always been provided in low profile; however, the advent of higher education and the challenges faced by both students and their tutors have generated a-must interest in student counselling (Kangai, Rupande, & Rugonye, 2011). These challenges include student drop out, low pass rate, change of department, low grade point average (GPA), and social problems (Kangai, Rupande, & Rugonye, 2011).

Ondima, Mokogi, Ombaba, and Osoro (2013) posited that students in secondary schools in Nyamira District of Kenya perceived guidance and counselling programme as being effective in enhancing their personal, career and academic competencies. Teacher counsellors and head teachers in the district also viewed guidance and counselling programme as playing a vital role in enhancing students' career, personal and academic competencies. Kangai, Rupande, and Rugonye (2011) studied student's perception on the quality and effectiveness of G&CS at the Zimbabwe Open University. They found that majority of students needed quality and effective guidance and counselling, and general academic support in the area of distribution of learning materials, management of coursework, tutorials, processing of examinations, communication, and individualized counselling. Nyanga, Oundo and Kamoyo (2014) studied the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on development of student's academic competence. They found that through the services, students in private universities had better growth in the academic competence than those enrolled in public universities.

Nyambura (2014) conducted a study on student's perception of the effectiveness of G&CS in curbing deviancy in secondary school in Juja Division of Thika County. Nyambura showed that effectiveness of G&CS was negatively affected by lack of resources and training in Guidance and Counselling, and non- counselling duties performed by school counsellors. Chireshe (2011) conducted a study on school counsellors and students' perceptions of the benefit of school G&CS in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that both school counsellors and students believed that the services resulted in personal-social, career and vocational benefits.

There is, therefore, need for effective counselling services which should be based on the need of the client, in this case the students, a complete understanding and acceptance of students' experiences. These services are not only crucial for those students who deviate from the norms, but for all university students (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2011). Therefore, students require counselling services in order to develop their academic competence. Effective counselling will enable them to deal with psychological problems they may experience and make rational decisions on how to solve or cope with the academic challenges (Krishnan, 2015).

Problem of Research

The advent of higher education and the challenges faced by both students and their tutors have generated much interest in the issues of student counselling. These challenges have

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been identified to include, but not limited to, lack of awareness of and need for G&CS which may affect the perception and use of the services, social and other academic related problems. However, a lot of controversy surround the quality and effectiveness of the counselling service provided in higher educational institutions. Literature has identified the need for G&CS from the perspectives of the counselling experts. However, the perception of the students on the need for and use of G&CS has not received much attention of researchers. Studies on the awareness of G&CS as perceived by students for which these services are mounted are also limited. Hence, this research sought to provide descriptive data on how effectively the G&CS has been able to positively affect the lives and personal goals of students based on their needs and awareness of the services provided at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB).

Research Focus

In pursuance of this aim, this study specifically examined the students' awareness of G&CS, identified the counselling needs of the respondents, assessed the students' benefits of G&CS, and the perception of students on the quality and effectiveness of the G&CS in the university.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

The study will be guided by the following research questions (RQ):
1. What is the current state of student's awareness of guidance and counselling services in the university?
2. What are the counselling needs of undergraduate students?
3. What are the benefits students derive from G&CS provided in the institution?
4. What is the students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS provided in the university?
5. How can the institution improve the quality and effectiveness of G&CS it provides?
This research also investigated the validity of two null hypotheses that were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:
$H_0 1$: There is no significant difference between students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS across all colleges.
$H_0 2$: There is no significant difference between male and female students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS.

This study was conducted in Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. It is a federal government-owned university located in Ogun State; South-Western Nigeria. It is one of the few specialist institutions. Undergraduate students' population during 2015/2016 session was 14, 199, majority of which reside off-campus. It is one of the few universities in Nigeria that has organized G&CS as an integral part of student support service system.
The study adopted descriptive survey design.

Sample of Research

The study covered all the ten Colleges in FUNAAB: Engineering; Management Science; Environment Resources Management; Food Science and Human Ecology; Animal Science and Livestock Production; Plant Science and Crop Protection; Veterinary Medicine, Biology; Physics; and Agricultural Management and Rural Development. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 283 respondents across the colleges for the study following Lincoln and Guba (2007).

Instrument and Procedures

Undergraduate Students' Perception of Guidance and Counselling Services Questionnaire was used to obtain data from the selected respondents. This instrument was divided into five main sections and socio-demographic section. The first main section focused on the respondents' state of awareness of G&CS. The second section had items requiring respondents' need for G&CS while the third section had items on perception and the fourth section focused on benefitted services from G&CS. The last section was on suggested improvement of the G&CS. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study that adopted split-half procedure in which 20 students participated following Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2005). The results of the split-half test scores showed that the reliability values for the five main sections were 0.86, 0.83, 0.72 0.83 and 0.75.

Data Analysis

The data generated from respondents' information obtained through the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages and mean, and inferential statistics such as t-test and ANOVA.

Results of Research

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents was obtained from respondents' information in the questionnaire. Summary is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Variable	Frequency (F)	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	139	49.1
Female	144	50.9
Age (years)		
17-20	91	32.2
21-25	147	51.9
26-30	45	15.9
>30	-	-
Mean age (years) = 22, Std. deviation = 2.2531		
Level		
100	62	21.9
200	85	29.7
300	61	21.6
400	51	18.0
500	23	8.1
600	1	0.4
Religion		
Christianity	173	47.7
Islam	107	29.5
Traditional	3	11.4
Accommodation		
On campus	108	38.2
Off campus	175	43.5

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents for this study. Table 1 showed that there are more (50.9%) female students in the sample than male (49.1%). Table 1 also revealed that more than half (51.9%) of the respondents were between the age group of 21-25 years old.

RQ1: What is the state of students' awareness and utilization of G&CS provided in the university?

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on the state of students' awareness and utilization of G&CS. Summary is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents' awareness and utilization of G&CS.

Variables	Frequency (F)	Percentages (%)
Awareness		
Aware	261	91.9
Not aware	22	7.8
Knowledge of Office Location		
Yes	215	76.0
No	68	24.0
Use G&CS		
Yes	149	52.7
No	134	47.3
Perceived Helpfulness		
Not helpful	18	6.4
Somewhat helpful	14	4.9
Helpful	40	14.1
Very helpful	211	74.6

Table 2 presents the result of respondents' awareness and utilization of G&CS provided by the institution. Table 2 revealed that 91.9% of the respondents were aware of G&CS in the university while 7.8% of the respondents were not aware of it. It was also revealed in Table 2 that 52.7% of the respondents were currently using the school counselling services while 47.3% of the respondents indicated that they are currently not using it. The result in Table 2 shows that 74.6% of the respondents currently using the services indicated that it was very helpful.

RQ2: What are the counselling needs of undergraduate students?

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on their counselling needs from the questionnaire. Summary is given in Table 3.

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Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to their counselling needs.

S/N	Items	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	Mean	Rank
1	Academic issues	188(66.4)	84(29.7)	10(3.5)	1(0.4)	3.62	1st
2	Exam pressure	163(57.6)	103(36.4)	14(4.9)	3(1.1)	3.51	2nd
3	Study techniques	157(55.5)	106(37.4)	18(6.4)	2(0.7)	3.48	3rd
4	Career issues	148(52.3)	103(36.4)	26(9.2)	6(2.1)	3.39	4th
5	Stress management	141(49.8)	111(39.2)	28(9.9)	3(1.1)	3.38	5th
6	Personal issues	139(49.1)	114(40.3)	18(6.4)	12(4.2)	3.34	6th
7	Social issues	133(47.0)	94(33.2)	45(15.9)	11(3.9)	3.23	7th

Note: SA= strongly agreed; A= Agreed; D= Disagreed; SD= strongly disagreed

Table 3 shows the result of the counselling needs of the respondents. Table 3 revealed the rating of the counselling needs of the respondents with academic issues (mean= 3.62) ranked highest, followed by exam pressure (mean=3.51), and then study techniques (mean=3.48). Other items ranked in the descending order are career issues (mean= 3.39), stress management (mean=3.38), personal issues (mean=3.34) while social issues (mean=3.23) ranked least.

RQ3: What are the benefits students derive from G&CS provided in the institution?

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on the areas of benefit derived from G&CS provided in the institution. Summary is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to benefits derived from G&CS in the institution.

SN	Benefitted counselling services	Frequency (F) *	Percentage (%)
1	Orientation services	265	93.6
2	Personal, social, vocational and academic counselling	187	66.1
3	Study habit therapy	156	55.1
4	Academic seminar	135	47.7
5	Referral services	133	47.0
6	Examination malpractice therapy	124	43.8
7	Information services	123	43.5
8	Placement/follow-up services	107	37.8
9	Counselling student on change of department	102	36.0
10	Liaison services	101	35.7
11	Career and vocational guidance	94	33.2
12	Admission of student into appropriate department	86	30.4

Note: * = Multiple response application

Table 4 presents the respondents' areas of benefit derived from the University G&CS. Table 4 revealed that 93.6% of the respondents benefitted from G&CS during the orientation services provided for fresh students while 66.1% of the respondents have benefitted from personal, social, academic and vocational counselling organized by G&CS. Table 4 showed that 55.1% of the respondent received help from study habit therapy, 47.7% of the respondents were aided by the academic seminars organized by the Counsellors and 47.0% of the respondents profited from the referral service of the counselling unit.

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*RQ4: What is the students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of
G&CS provided in the university?*

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on their perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS in the university obtained from the questionnaire. Summary is given in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to their perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS in the university.

S/N	ITEMS	Highly effective F (%)	Moderately effective F (%)	Not effective F (%)	Mean	Rank
A	**Students' perception of services provided by G&CS Unit**					
1	Fresh students' orientation services	165(58.3)	108(38.2)	10(3.5)	2.55	1st
2	Personal, social, academic and vocational counselling	154(54.4)	114(40.3)	15(5.3)	2.49	2nd
3	Academic seminar	138(48.8)	128(45.2)	17(6.0)	2.43	3rd
4	Career and vocational guidance	117(41.3)	149(52.7)	17(6.0)	2.35	4th
5	Counselling student on change of department	122(43.1)	134(47.3)	27(9.5)	2.34	5th
6	Placement/follow- up services	131(49.9)	117(41.3)	35(12.4)	2.34	6th
B	**Students' perception of Counsellors skills and professionalism**					
1	Respect and empathize with client	145(51.2)	119(42.2)	19(6.7)	2.45	1st
2	Good knowledge of clients challenges	147(51.9)	117(41.3)	19(6.7)	2.45	2nd
3	Professional conduct	135(47.7)	130(45.9)	18(6.4)	2.41	3rd
4	Rapport with client	129(45.6)	132(46.6)	22(7.8)	2.38	4th

Table 5 shows the students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS in the University. The ranking was done based on the mean. Table 5 showed that freshers' orientation service was ranked first (mean = 2.55) among students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS while personal, social, academic and vocational counselling ranked second (mean= 2.49). The other services ranked in descending order were academic seminar (mean=2.43), career/vocational guidance (mean=2.35) and counselling student on change of department (mean=2.34). The Counsellor's skills and professionalism were rated and respondents perceived that clients were treated with respect and empathy ranked first (mean=2.45) followed by good knowledge of client challenges (mean=2.45), and professional conduct (mean=2.41).

RQ5: How can the institution improve the quality and effectiveness of G&CS it provides?

This question was answered with data from respondents' information on how to improve the quality and effectiveness of G&CS in the university. Summary is given in Table 6.

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Table 6. Distribution of respondents on the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS.

S/N	Suggested Improvements	SA F (%)	A F (%)	D F (%)	SD F (%)	Mean	
1	I will use the counselling services (CS) if my College has Counsellor	182(64.4)	73(25.8)	22(7.8)	6(2.1)	3.52	1st
2	Increase the number of Counsellors in the University	127(44.9)	104(36.7)	37(13.1)	15(5.3)	3.36	2nd
3	I will use the CS if aware of services offered	140(49.5)	107(37.0)	27(9.5)	9(3.2)	3.33	3rd
4	I will use the CS if Unit offer shift appointment	149(52.7)	70(24.7)	36(12.7)	28(9.9)	3.20	4th
5	Environment of the counselling unit is conducive for counselling	130(46.0)	97(34.3)	37(13.1)	19(6.7)	3.19	5th
6	Professionalism in the quality of CS delivered.	63(22.3)	50(17.7)	108(38.0)	62(21.9)	2.40	6th

Table 6 shows the rating of how the G&CS of the institution can be improved. Table 6 showed that the respondents will use the counselling services (CS) if their Colleges have Counsellors ranked first (mean = 3.52) among the improvement of G&CS, followed by the need to increase the number of school counsellors (mean=3.36). The other improvement ranked in descending order was that they will use the CS if aware of services offered (mean = 3.33), offer shift appointment (mean = 3.20), if environment is conducive for counselling (mean = 3.19) and professionalism in the quality of services delivered (mean = 2.40).

$H_0 1$: There is no significant difference in students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS across all colleges.

The responses of sampled students indicating their perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS were scored and these were compared across the ten Colleges. ANOVA was used to test whether significant difference exists in their students' mean perception. Results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. ANOVA of the perception of quality and effectiveness of G&CS across all colleges.

	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	p
Between groups	455.771	9	50.641		
				3.247	0.001
Within groups	4257.904	273	15.597		
Total	4713.675	282			

Decision criteria: reject null hypothesis if p<0.05, accept null hypothesis if p>0.05

Table 7 revealed that there is a significant difference in the perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS across all colleges (F = 3.247, P < 0.05). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The basic focus of this research was to establish whether students differ significantly across the Colleges in their perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS.

H_02: There is no significant difference between male and female students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS.

Male and female students' means on perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS were obtained and subjected to the t-test. Results are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8. t-Test table for male and female students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Crit-t	Cal-t	df	p
Male	139	29.24	3.852				
				1.96	-0.639	281	0.523
Female	144	29.55	4.313				

Decision criteria: reject null hypothesis if p<0.05, accept null hypothesis if p>0.05

Table 8 presents the t-test analysis of significant difference between male and female undergraduate students' perception of G&CS. Result showed that there is no significant difference between male and female students' perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS (t = -0.639, p<0.05). The null hypothesis was therefore accepted.

Discussion

The mean age of the respondents was 22 which implies that the respondents were youth and are in their active age when they need G&CS in order to handle day-to-day psychological and social problems arising from their transition from childhood to adulthood. This service will help to overcome modern challenges afflicting the Nigeria society and to assist them to develop competencies necessary to overcome academic, career and personal problems.

It can be inferred from the result of the study that publicity and awareness programmes for the G&CS within the school were reaching the majority of the student population. Enlightenment programme should be mounted in order to reach the entire student population. This finding corroborates the submission of Gysbers and Henderson (2006) that awareness is an ideal initial step towards a successful counselling and guidance programme for students. If guidance and counselling organ of tertiary institutions could sustain the sensitization of the students on the importance of G&CS, then there would be optimal utilization of the expertise of the Counsellors for students' academic success. Majority of the students patronize the G&CS in the university and this agrees with Martin (2002) who posited that the decision to engage in counselling may be underlain by educational and career choices of the students. Thus, one's career aspirations may be important to a student's participation in guidance counselling.

Result implies that the guidance and counselling needs of the respondents are most prominent in the aspect relating to their academic issues. This shows that they are focused on the academic matters which is the main object of tertiary education. This agrees with Martin (2002) who posited that the fundamental thought behind guidance and counselling in general lays in the fact that people often need guidance when faced with the need to make significant decisions that affect both themselves and those around them. Hence, counsellors should focus their attention on the development of effective study habits in relation to how undergraduate students can utilize their assets and manage their abilities for optimal career development. Moreover, personal and social life issues ranked least among areas of need as perceived by the respondents. The implication of this finding is that student support programmes of the institution might have neglected this important aspect of human development in their sensitization campaign during freshers' orientation.

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The areas of benefit identified by the respondents included orientation services provided for fresh students, personal, social, academic and vocational counselling, and study habit therapy. These findings are in line with the study which posited that it is pertinent for student guidance counselling to inculcate the provision of knowledge and skills relating to the pupil's personal and social development, self-awareness, decision making, and planning (Shoffner & Briggs, 2001). The counsellors, however, need to do more work in the areas of providing academic seminars and referral service for the students.

The result of the study implied that respondents' perception of quality and effectiveness of G&CS was influenced by their cognitive styles and individual experiences with guidance and counselling processes, as well as the available information which they might have gained through peers' experience. Placement/follow-up service which ranked lowest should be improved upon. Proper follow up service by counsellors is necessary for effective and quality service delivery to the students.

Over-centralisation of G&CS, which is the current practice, may affect the response of students to the use of and may inhibit access to the services. Students perceived that they need more counsellors at their various colleges for effective G&CS that will take care of their interests. This would also lead to improved service delivery by counsellors and would address specific needs of related group of colleges. This may increase cost of providing G&CS borne by academic institutions. It should, however, be noted that providing G&CS is part of the social service rendered by tertiary institutions (Idowu & Adeoye 1990).

The result from hypothesis testing implied that the perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS varies across all the colleges. This may have been influenced by the needs of the students which differ across the various fields of study. Gamble and Gamble (2002) inferred that perceptions may differ markedly from actual events among different people. It can similarly be expected that perception of G&CS for students may differ according to individual students' need since the study covered all the Colleges which encompasses varying academic disciplines. From this perspective, perceptual differences may result from processes involved in individual formation of perception of a phenomenon.

There is no gender difference in the perception of G&CS. It is therefore adduced that both male and female perceive G&CS as being quality and effective. This may not be unconnected with the high level of awareness of G&CS among the respondents. This is different from the findings of Mpofu, Thomas and Chan (2004) which asserted that more female students than male students could also have rated the services more positively and effectiveness probably because female students are perceived as more socially competent or better adjusted to school than males. These characteristics may have influenced them to be more positive in their perception of the students' G&CS. And the study of Van Der Riet and Knoetze (2004) which said that more male students than female students could have rated the students G&CS negatively because they are normally socialized to be strong and cope with their own problems hence they often do not approach school counsellors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated students' need for, awareness, perception and use of Guidance and Counselling Services (G&CS) in a university in Nigeria.

The study concluded that there is high awareness of the G&CS among students and that they were currently using the services. The G&CS was assisting students attain competencies needed to overcome academic, career and personal concerns. The freshers' orientation service received the highest perception among the respondents on the quality and effectiveness of G&CS followed by personal, social, academic and vocational counselling. The study also concluded that the G&CS needs of the students across the colleges differ due to the dissimilarities in their disciplines. Students differ significantly across Colleges in their perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS. There is no gender difference in the perception of the quality and effectiveness of G&CS.

It was recommended that the quality and effectiveness of G&CS should be evaluated for tertiary institutions in order to help the counsellors bridge the gap between students' perceived need for their services and counselling services provided. It was recommended that the authorities in higher institutions should establish clear policies that would improve and strengthen G&CS to make them effective for the attainment of students' academic competence.

The researchers suggested for further studies: optimal counsellor-to-student ratio for effective G&CS in higher institutions; role of belief system on students' perception of quality and effectiveness of G&CS; and the scope of the present study be expanded to include conventional and private universities in Ogun State, in Nigeria and even in Africa.

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