

Counsellor Attributes and Competence in Interpreting Psychological Tests in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This study examined the predictive influence of counsellor attributes on competence in interpreting psychological tests in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with a population comprising 245 registered counsellors in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 210 respondents was selected using multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled "Counsellor Attributes and Psychological Test Interpretation Questionnaire (CAPTIQ)," which was validated by three experts and demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.82 using Cronbach Alpha. Simple linear regression analysis was employed to answer research questions and test hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that interest in using psychological tests, perceived usefulness of psychological testing, and ethical attitude toward test usage significantly predicted counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests. The study concluded that counsellor attributes are significant predictors of test interpretation competence. It was recommended that continuous professional development programmes be organised to enhance counsellors' interest, ethical awareness, and appreciation of psychological testing.

Keywords: Counsellor attributes, psychological test, competence, interest, perceived usefulness, ethical attitude

Introduction

Secondary education represents a critical phase in adolescents' developmental trajectory, during which academic, vocational, emotional, and social decisions begin to take more defined shape. Within this context, guidance and counselling services play an indispensable role in assisting students to understand themselves, make informed decisions, and adjust effectively to academic and life challenges. Central to the effectiveness of these services is the use of psychological testing, which provides a scientific and objective basis for understanding individual differences among students.

Psychological tests are standardised instruments designed to measure various dimensions of human behaviour, including cognitive abilities, personality traits, interests, aptitudes, and emotional functioning (Anastasi & Urbina, 2017). In school settings, these tests serve as essential tools for decision-making in career guidance, placement, diagnosis of learning difficulties, and behavioural interventions. However, the usefulness of psychological tests lies not merely in their

administration but significantly in the accuracy and competence with which their results are interpreted. Interpretation serves as the bridge between raw test data and meaningful counselling outcomes; without proper interpretation, even the most valid and reliable tests may lead to misleading conclusions (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2018).

Competence in interpreting psychological tests is therefore a fundamental professional requirement for school counsellors. This competence involves a combination of technical knowledge, analytical skills, ethical sensitivity, and practical judgement. A competent counsellor must not only understand test construction and scoring procedures but also be able to contextualise test results within the socio-cultural and educational background of the student. In a diverse society such as Nigeria, where cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences are pronounced, the interpretation of psychological test results requires even greater sensitivity and expertise to avoid bias and misclassification (Ogunleye, 2022). Competence in psychological test interpretation encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to administer, score, and interpret various assessment instruments effectively. Research has shown that counsellor competence is a critical factor that attracts students to counselling services in public secondary schools (Okeke *et al.*, 2020). The National Center for Guidance Education identified four key areas of counsellor competence: knowledge, the counselling relationship, counselling skills, and professional/ethical attitudes and practice. These competencies are directly relevant to psychological testing, as counsellors must possess sound knowledge of psychometric principles, establish appropriate relationships during testing sessions, demonstrate skilled test administration techniques, and adhere to ethical standards in test interpretation.

Psychological tests commonly used in Nigerian educational settings include achievement tests such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), interest inventories like the Motivation for Occupational Preference Scale (MOPS), and personality assessments (Garba & Abba, 2025). The core aim of these tests is to help identify individual differences and guide students toward adequate choices in their academic and vocational lives (Garba & Abba, 2025). Counsellors' competence in interpreting these tests is essential for diagnosing learning difficulties, identifying career interests, and supporting students' value re-orientation.

Despite the recognised importance of competence in psychological test interpretation, there is growing concern that many school counsellors may not possess the required level of proficiency. While formal training provides foundational knowledge, the actual competence demonstrated in practice is often influenced by personal and professional attributes of the counsellor. These attributes shape how counsellors perceive, engage with, and apply psychological testing in their professional roles.

One of the most critical attributes is interest in using psychological tests. Interest serves as a motivational force that drives learning, engagement, and continuous professional development. (Bergquist, *et al.*, 2023). The concept of interest is recognized as multidimensional, involving components such as emotion, value, knowledge, and engagement (Özcan, *et al.*, 2026). Therefore, psychological tests must be carefully designed to capture these different facets. For instance, the Multidimensional Interest Development Survey (MIS) was developed to capture diverse interest components and developmental stages, demonstrating the sensitivity of these tools to how interest changes over time. Similarly, the Interest Index was evaluated for its scale properties, showing

high internal consistency and test-retest reliability, which are critical for ensuring that a test accurately and consistently measures an individual's interests

Counsellors who demonstrate a high level of interest in psychological testing are more likely to seek further training, stay updated with emerging testing techniques, and apply testing procedures more rigorously. Conversely, lack of interest may result in avoidance of testing practices, superficial engagement, and ultimately poor interpretation of results. Interest therefore functions as a catalyst that enhances both skill acquisition and practical competence.

Closely related to interest is the perceived usefulness of psychological testing. Perception plays a crucial role in shaping professional behaviour (Hrgović *et al.*, 2025). Counsellors who perceive psychological tests as valuable and indispensable tools for counselling are more likely to integrate them effectively into their practice. Such counsellors are inclined to invest time and effort in understanding test results and using them to inform decision-making. Conversely, counsellors who perceive psychological testing as irrelevant, cumbersome, or unreliable may underutilise these tools or rely on subjective judgement, thereby compromising the quality of counselling services (Okon & Udoh, 2020). Thus, perceived usefulness influences not only the frequency of test usage but also the depth of engagement in interpretation.

Another fundamental attribute is ethical attitude toward test usage, which underpins all aspects of psychological testing. Psychological tests involve sensitive and confidential information, and their misuse can have serious implications for students, including misdiagnosis, labelling, and inappropriate placement (American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, 2014). Ethical competence requires counsellors to adhere to professional standards such as confidentiality, informed consent, fairness, and appropriate use of test results. Counsellors with strong ethical attitudes are more likely to interpret test results responsibly, avoid bias, and ensure that interpretations are used in the best interest of the student (American Psychological Association, 2020). In contrast, weak ethical orientation may lead to careless interpretation, violation of students' rights, and misuse of psychological data.

The interplay between a counsellor's interest, perceived usefulness of testing, and ethical stance is far more than a technical equation it reflects the living, breathing reality of how counsellors engage with their work. This view recognises that competence in test interpretation emerges not just from formal qualifications, but from a counsellor's genuine commitment to the assessment process itself. When a counsellor finds meaning in test interpretation and trusts its value for students, their approach becomes more thoughtful and effective. This aligns with contemporary understandings of professional competence as the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes demonstrated in professional performance (Nurbatin & Sanyata, 2025).

Research affirms that counsellors are ethically and legally bound to use only those testing and assessment services for which they have been trained and are competent. This means that competence is not static it grows through ongoing reflection and a willingness to examine one's own attitudes and biases. The ethical dimension is equally vital: the ACA Code of Ethics explicitly requires that counsellors responsible for decisions based on assessment results possess a thorough understanding of psychometrics (Sari & Setyawan 2023).

Empirical studies have consistently highlighted the importance of psychological testing in educational settings. For instance, Okon and Udoh (2020) found that effective use of psychological tests significantly improves the accuracy of educational decision-making among secondary school students. Similarly, Ibrahim and Abubakar (2022) reported that proper application of assessment tools enhances the identification and support of students with diverse needs. However, these studies have largely focused on the outcomes of psychological testing rather than the attributes of counsellors that influence the effectiveness of test interpretation. This creates a gap in the literature, particularly in the context of Akwa Ibom State, where limited attention has been given to examining how counsellor-related factors predict competence in psychological testing.

Given the increasing demand for evidence-based counselling practices in schools, it becomes imperative to investigate the factors that influence counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests. Understanding the role of counsellor attributes in this process will provide valuable insights for improving training programmes, enhancing professional practice, and ultimately strengthening the quality of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine how counsellor attributes specifically interest in using psychological tests, perceived usefulness of psychological testing, and ethical attitude toward test usage predict competence in interpreting psychological tests in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal school setting, counsellors are expected to demonstrate high competence in interpreting psychological tests to support students' academic and personal development. Psychological testing should be used effectively to guide decisions regarding career placement, academic support, and behavioural interventions. However, in many secondary schools, counsellors often exhibit low competence in interpreting psychological tests. Some counsellors lack interest in using tests, others doubt their usefulness, while some fail to adhere to ethical standards. This situation results in inaccurate interpretations, poor decision-making, and ineffective counselling services. Despite efforts such as training programmes and workshops introduced to improve counsellor competence, the problem persists. Therefore, this study seeks to determine whether counsellor attributes such as interest, perceived usefulness, and ethical attitude predict competence in interpreting psychological tests in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent does interest in using psychological tests predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests?
2. To what extent does perceived usefulness of psychological testing predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests?
3. To what extent does ethical attitude toward test usage predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. Interest in using psychological tests does not significantly predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

2. Perceived usefulness of psychological testing does not significantly predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.
3. Ethical attitude toward test usage does not significantly predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

Research Method

The researcher adopted a descriptive survey design for the study. This design was chosen because it explains ongoing situations, describes real-life phenomena without manipulation, captures attitudes and behaviours as they naturally occur, and facilitates data collection to answer research questions and test hypotheses regarding the existing status of the phenomenon (Maurya *et al.*, 2020). The population of this study comprised 445 registered members of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), Akwa Ibom State Branch. A sample of 210 respondents was selected using multistage sampling technique. The sample size represented approximately 85.7% of the population, which was considered adequate because the population was relatively small and accessible. Using a larger sample improves representativeness, reduces sampling error, and increases the reliability of the study findings (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled "Counsellor Attributes and Psychological Test Interpretation Questionnaire (CAPTIQ)," structured on a four-point Likert scale (SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1). To establish the reliability coefficient, an internal consistency approach was adopted. A trial test was conducted by administering the instrument to 20 respondents (five practicing counsellors and fifteen student-counsellors) selected randomly from the study area but not among the sample of the study. Cronbach Alpha analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Data collected were analysed using simple linear regression statistics. The null hypotheses were tested using the p-value at the 0.05 alpha level of significance. The regression analysis provided both predictive estimates (R and R²) and significance testing.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does interest in using psychological tests predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests?

Table 1: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Interest in Using Psychological Tests and Competence

Variables	R	R ²	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R ²	Remarks
Interest in Psychological Tests	0.842	0.709	70.9%	0.707	High Extent

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the correlation coefficient (R) between interest in using psychological tests and counsellors' competence is 0.842, reflecting a strong and positive relationship. The coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.709, meaning that 70.9% of the variance in counsellors' competence can be explained by their level of interest in using psychological tests. This represents a high extent of prediction, suggesting that interest is a major contributing factor to competence in psychological test interpretation. The adjusted R² value of 0.707 confirms the stability and reliability of this prediction.

Research Question 2: To what extent does perceived usefulness of psychological testing predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests?

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Usefulness and Competence

Variables	R	R ²	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R ²	Remarks
Perceived Usefulness	0.765	0.585	58.5%	0.583	Moderate Extent

Table 2 reveals that the correlation coefficient (R) between perceived usefulness of psychological testing and counsellors' competence is 0.765, indicating a moderate to strong positive relationship. The R² value of 0.585 shows that 58.5% of the variation in counsellors' competence is accounted for by their perception of the usefulness of psychological testing. This reflects a moderate extent of prediction, indicating that while perceived usefulness is an important factor, it is not as strong a predictor as interest.

Research Question 3: To what extent does ethical attitude toward test usage predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests?

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Ethical Attitude and Competence

Variables	R	R ²	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R ²	Remarks
Ethical Attitude	0.801	0.642	64.2%	0.640	High Extent

The results in Table 3 show that the correlation coefficient (R) between ethical attitude toward test usage and counsellors' competence is 0.801, indicating a strong positive relationship. The coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.642, meaning that 64.2% of the variance in competence is explained by ethical attitude. This represents a high extent of prediction, highlighting the significant role of ethical considerations in psychological test interpretation.

Hypothesis 1: Interest in using psychological tests does not significantly predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Interest in Psychological Tests and Counsellors' Competence

Variables	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	MS	p-cal	p-crit	Decision at p<.05
Interest in Psychological Tests Counsellors' Competence	Regression	198.456	1	198.456	.000*	.05	Reject H ₀₁
	Residual	81.544	280	0.392			

*Significant at .05 alpha level.

The result shows that the calculated p-value of 0.000 is less than the critical value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that interest in using psychological tests significantly predicts counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived usefulness of psychological testing does not significantly predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Usefulness and Counsellors' Competence

Variables	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	MS	p-cal	p-crit	Decision at $p < .05$
Perceived Usefulness	Regression	165.782	1	165.782	.000*	.05	Reject H_{02}
Counsellors' Competence	Residual	114.218	208	0.549			

* Significant at .05 alpha level.

The calculated p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that perceived usefulness of psychological testing significantly predicts counsellors' competence.

Hypothesis 3: Ethical attitude toward test usage does not significantly predict counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Ethical Attitude and Counsellors' Competence

Variables	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	MS	p-cal	p-crit	Decision at $p < .05$
Ethical Attitude	Regression	182.934	1	182.934	.000*	.05	Reject H_{03}
Counsellors' Competence	Residual	97.066	208	0.467			

*Significant at .05 alpha level.

Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that ethical attitude toward test usage significantly predicts counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that interest in using psychological tests significantly predicts counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests, with a high extent of prediction ($R^2 = 0.709$). This implies that counsellors who demonstrate a strong interest in psychological testing are more likely to develop the necessary skills required for accurate interpretation of test results. This finding is consistent with the work of Okon and Udoh (2020), who reported that active engagement with assessment practices improves the effectiveness of educational decision-making in secondary schools. The implication of this finding is that fostering interest in psychological testing among counsellors is crucial for improving the quality of counselling services in schools.

The study also revealed that perceived usefulness of psychological testing significantly predicts counsellors' competence, although at a moderate extent ($R^2 = 0.585$). This suggests that counsellors who perceive psychological testing as valuable and relevant are more likely to demonstrate competence in interpreting test results. This finding underscores the importance of perception in shaping professional behaviour. When counsellors recognise the practical benefits of

psychological testing in areas such as student assessment, career guidance, and behavioural intervention, they are more motivated to utilise these tools effectively. Such counsellors are likely to invest time in understanding test outcomes and applying them appropriately in decision-making processes. Conversely, counsellors who perceive psychological testing as unnecessary or unreliable may underutilise these tools, thereby limiting their competence in interpretation.

The finding aligns with Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2018), who argued that the effectiveness of psychological testing depends largely on the user's understanding of its relevance and application. This implies that improving counsellors' awareness of the usefulness of psychological testing can enhance their competence and overall effectiveness in practice. The findings further indicated that ethical attitude toward test usage significantly predicts counsellors' competence in interpreting psychological tests, with a high extent of prediction ($R^2 = 0.642$). This demonstrates that counsellors who adhere to ethical standards are more likely to interpret psychological tests accurately and responsibly. This result can be attributed to the critical role of ethics in psychological assessment. Ethical attitudes ensure that counsellors handle test results with confidentiality, fairness, and professionalism. Counsellors with strong ethical orientation are careful in interpreting results, avoid bias, and ensure that interpretations are used in the best interest of the student. In contrast, poor ethical attitudes may lead to misuse of test results, misinterpretation, and decisions that may negatively affect students. This finding is in agreement with the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2020), which emphasise that ethical competence is fundamental to psychological testing and interpretation. The implication of this finding is that ethical training and adherence to professional standards are indispensable for enhancing counsellors' competence in psychological testing.

Conclusion

The study concluded that counsellor attributes, interest in using psychological tests, perceived usefulness of psychological testing, and ethical attitude toward test usage significantly predict competence in interpreting psychological tests in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Among these attributes, interest emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by ethical attitude, while perceived usefulness demonstrated moderate predictive capacity. Therefore, improving these attributes will enhance counselling effectiveness and contribute to better student outcomes in secondary schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Training programmes should be organised to increase counsellors' interest in psychological testing. These programmes should incorporate hands-on experiences and practical applications to make testing procedures more engaging and relevant.
2. Workshops should be conducted to highlight the usefulness of psychological tests in educational decision-making. Counsellors should be exposed to evidence-based case studies demonstrating how accurate test interpretation leads to improved student outcomes.
3. Ethical guidelines should be reinforced through continuous professional development. Counselling associations and regulatory bodies should mandate periodic ethics training to ensure counsellors remain current with professional standards.

4. Counsellor education programmes should place greater emphasis on psychological testing competencies during pre-service training, integrating practical interpretation exercises with theoretical instruction.
5. School administrators should provide resources and support to enable counsellors to access current testing materials and participate in professional development opportunities related to psychological assessment.

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