SCHOOL COUNSELLING

Principals' Leadership Behavior as a Predictor of Counselors' Morale in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

The manner in which a school principal behaves has a direct influence on the behavior and professional disposition of school counselors and other personnel around him. This study investigated principals' leadership behavior, disaggregated into initiating structure (task-oriented behavior) and consideration (relationship-oriented behavior), as a predictor of counsellors' morale in secondary schools in two Local Government Areas of Owerri Education Zone, Imo State. A predictive correlational survey design was adopted. The population comprised 180 secondary school counselors, all of whom were studied using the census method. Two research questions guided the study, and two null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Data were collected using the Principals' Leadership Behavior and Counselors' Morale Questionnaire (PLBCMQ), a 24-item four-point Likert-scale instrument validated by three experts and yielding Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .81, .84 and .87 for its three sections. Research questions were answered using simple linear regression to determine the proportion of variance in counselors' morale accounted for by each leadership dimension, while the hypotheses were tested using the regression ANOVA F-test. Findings revealed that both initiating structure and consideration significantly and positively predicted counselors' morale, with consideration behavior emerging as the markedly stronger predictor, accounting for 37.5% of the variance in morale compared with 14.9% for initiating structure. Based on the findings, it was recommended that principals be trained to prioritize consideration behaviors, such as approachability and recognition of counselors' welfare, alongside, rather than instead of, the task-oriented behaviors needed to keep counseling units functioning effectively.

Keywords: Leadership behavior; initiating structure; consideration; counselors' morale; predictive correlational design

1 Introduction

The morale of school counselors, understood as their overall enthusiasm, confidence, and sense of purpose in carrying out their guidance and counseling duties, is widely regarded as a determinant of how effectively counselling services function within a school (Nnaji and Okoli, 2020). Counselors who report low morale tend to withdraw from proactive engagement with students, limit themselves to reactive case handling, and show higher intention to leave the profession, all of which erode the quality of guidance services available to students (Ibekwe and Chukwuemeka, 2021). Among the many factors that shape counselor morale, the leadership behavior of the school principal, as the immediate administrative authority under whom counsellors operate, has attracted particular

research attention, since principals control the resources, scheduling, and recognition that counsellors depend on to do their work.

Leadership has been defined variously by different authors based on the context of its usage. Generally, leadership is defined as the ability to influence others without force or violence. The popular belief that quality leadership is a major factor in schools and students‟ performance remains true to this day (Ololube, 2018a).

Leadership behavior refers broadly to the manner in which a leader directs, coordinates, communicates with, supports, and relates to members of an organization in the pursuit of organizational goals. In the context of a school, principal leadership behavior is reflected in how principals establish expectations, organize school activities, supervise staff, communicate responsibilities, provide support, recognize staff contributions, and respond to employees' professional and personal needs. Different patterns of leadership behaviour may create different experiences for school personnel. A principal who provides clear expectations and establishes appropriate procedures may help staff understand their responsibilities, whereas a principal who demonstrates warmth, trust, recognition, and concern may strengthen staff members' feelings of belonging and professional value. Thus, examining leadership behaviour in its specific dimensions provides a more precise understanding of how school administration may influence employees' work experiences. An effective relationship between the principal and school counselor is essential when improving student achievement. To have an effective relationship, there must be communication, trust and respect, leadership, and collaborative planning between the principal and school counselor (College Board, 2011). Principals and school counselors are both instrumental leaders in the schools and they are most effective when they are able to carry-out their appropriate roles. It is important that principals assign appropriate counseling duties and responsibilities and not administrative and coordination responsibilities. Allowing the school counselor to implement counseling programs will help principals to identify and address issues that contribute to academic failure. The relationship of the school principal and school counselor is instrumental in student success. The College Board (2011) states, “The desired outcome of an effective principal-counselor relationship is to raise achievement levels for all students and ensure equity in educational outcomes” (p.8).

The Ohio State Leadership Studies provide a useful framework for examining such behaviour. The studies identified two relatively independent dimensions of leadership behaviour: initiating structure and consideration (Halpin and Winer, 1957). Initiating structure refers to the extent to which a leader defines and organizes the roles of subordinates, establishes standards of performance, clarifies responsibilities, sets deadlines, and directs activities towards the accomplishment of organizational goals. In a school setting, a principal demonstrating initiating structure may clearly communicate counsellors' responsibilities, establish procedures for counselling activities, monitor assigned duties, organize programs, and ensure that expected tasks are completed. Such behaviour can provide counsellors with direction and role clarity, particularly where their responsibilities are not clearly defined within the school structure.

Consideration, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a leader demonstrates trust, respect, warmth, openness, friendliness, and concern for the welfare of subordinates. A principal who demonstrates consideration may listen to counsellors' concerns, appreciate their contributions, involve them in relevant decisions, provide encouragement, recognize good performance, and maintain approachable interpersonal relationships. For school counsellors, who frequently deal with sensitive student issues and may themselves encounter demanding professional situations, such

interpersonal support may be particularly relevant to their morale. Consideration can communicate to counsellors that their professional contributions are valued and that they are regarded as important members of the school community.

This study was anchored on the Ohio State Leadership Studies' two-factor model of initiating structure and consideration (Halpin and Winer, 1957), and on Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory of motivation, which distinguishes hygiene factors, whose absence causes dissatisfaction, from motivators, whose presence generates genuine satisfaction and morale. Read together, these frameworks suggest that initiating structure, by ensuring counselors have the role clarity and organizational support needed to function, may operate more like a hygiene factor whose absence depresses morale, while consideration, by directly addressing counselors' sense of being valued, may operate more like a motivator with a stronger positive pull on morale, a distinction this study's predictive design was well placed to test.

Empirical evidence broadly supports a link between principal leadership behavior and staff morale in Nigerian schools. Nnaji and Okoli (2020) found that principals' supportive leadership behaviour was significantly and positively related to teacher morale in secondary schools in South-East Nigeria. Ibekwe and Chukwuemeka (2021) reported a significant positive relationship between principals' interpersonal consideration and counselors' job satisfaction, a construct closely related to morale. Okafor, Umeh, and Nnamdi (2022), using regression analysis, found that principals' consideration behaviour significantly predicted teachers' organizational commitment more strongly than did initiating structure, echoing the hygiene-versus-motivator distinction drawn from Herzberg's theory. Olusakin (2001) similarly found that counsellors who rated their principals high on approachability and recognition reported significantly higher morale than those who rated their principals high mainly on task supervision, while Okoro (2022) found that excessive initiating structure, when not paired with consideration, was associated with lower staff morale despite improving procedural compliance. Despite this accumulating evidence, few Nigerian studies have modelled the two leadership dimensions as separate predictors of counsellors' morale specifically, a gap the present study sought to address.

1.1 Statement of the problem

School counselors in many Nigerian secondary schools continue to report low morale, manifesting as disengagement from proactive guidance activities and, in some cases, requests for transfer out of counseling roles altogether, and principals are frequently identified informally as a contributing factor. What remains unclear is which specific dimension of a principal's leadership behavior, the task-oriented structuring of counselors' work or the relationship-oriented consideration shown toward them, more strongly predicts their morale, information that matters because it points toward different, and not necessarily overlapping, areas of principal training. Without empirical evidence disaggregating these two dimensions, professional development programs for principals risk emphasizing the wrong behaviors, or emphasizing both equally when one may carry substantially more predictive weight than the other. It was against this problem that the present study set out to determine the extent to which principals' initiating structure and consideration leadership behaviors predict counselors' morale.

1.2 Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does principals' initiating structure leadership behavior predict counselors' morale?
2. To what extent does principals' consideration leadership behavior predict counselors' morale?

1.3 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

H_{01}: Principals' initiating structure leadership behavior does not significantly predict counselors' morale.

H_{02}: Principals' consideration leadership behavior does not significantly predict counselors' morale.

2 Theoretical review

Arowolo (2013) noted that most principals do not wake up planning to break a counselor's spirit. They simply do not understand what the counseling role really is. In many secondary schools in Imo State, this lack of understanding quietly wears counselors down. Sometimes it shows in the way their role is gradually erased. A trained counsellor is given a full teaching load of eighteen to twenty four periods and still expected to counsel effectively. At other times he or she is called to fill every gap, to help type a document, to invigilate, to go and settle a fight in junior or senior classes. There is no clear job description, so he or she never really knows where teaching stops and counseling starts. With time the school guidance counsellor begins to feel less like a professional counselor and more like a spare teacher. Omoniyi (2016) indicated that at other times it is the structure that frustrates them. There is no counseling room, so they counsel in the staff room, in the library or under a tree where everyone can hear. There is no period for guidance and counseling on the timetable. There is no referral system, so the principal bypasses the counselor and handles serious behavior cases with the cane or suspension. Even access to basic student records is withheld. How do you help a child you are not allowed to know? But what hurts most is when consideration is missing. Decisions about student welfare are taken without ever asking the counselor. When a student changes for the better after weeks of counseling, the principal says our discipline worked, not our counselor worked. Sometimes correction comes as a public embarrassment before students or colleagues (Eboka, 2016). And while the counselor carries the emotional weight of listening to trauma day after day, no one ever pauses to ask how are you coping. There is also the betrayal of confidentiality. A principal insists, tell me what that girl told you, or uses what was shared in counseling to punish a student. That puts the counselor in an impossible ethical position. Once students realize their secrets are not safe, trust is gone and without trust, counseling cannot work. Then comes comparison and micromanagement (Olusakin, 2001). Look at Mr Emeka in Mathematics, he is producing results, what are you producing. The principal demands daily lesson notes for counseling, as if healing and guidance can be counted like test scores. Success is measured by how many students were counseled, not by what changed in their lives. Slowly, isolation sets in. The counselor is not invited to management meetings where student welfare is discussed. Parents are introduced to one of our teachers, not our school counselor. Opportunities for CASSON workshops or professional growth are never approved. Put simply, many principals destroy counselors' morale not out of wickedness, but by treating them as spare hands to be used, rather than as specialist professionals to be protected. The good news is the reverse is also

true. Morale comes back when principals protect most of their time for counseling, give them even a small private space, mention them proudly by title as our school counselor, ask sincerely what do you need to do your work better, and defend confidentiality even when they are curious to know.

Counselors unknowingly lower their own morale by how they position themselves in the school. Many sit in their office waiting for students to come or for the principal to call them. When no one comes, they feel irrelevant and forgotten. In Nigerian schools relevance must be made visible. If you do not do orientation for new students, do career talks, paste guidance notices and follow up on cases, teachers will simply forget you exist. Omoniyi (2016) noted that counseling has suffered from lack of visibility and advocacy in schools, which is why its services are often overlooked despite being in the National Policy on Education since 1981. Some try to prove hard work by fighting to take more teaching periods. They accept to be exam officer, English teacher, note checker, and then complain that counseling is not respected. In doing that they teach the school to disrespect their own profession. Arowolo (2013) found that wrong perception of counselling and assigning counselors to non counseling duties were ranked as the most serious problems confronting counselors in Nigeria. When you accept those duties, you reinforce the perception. Confidentiality is another quiet killer of morale. Telling one teacher what a student told you in the name of gist spreads quickly. Once it goes round that the counsellor talks, students stop coming. Then you sit with an empty room and feel useless. Confidentiality is the currency of your job and when you spend it you become bankrupt. Salgong et al. (2016) in their assessment of counseling challenges identified lack of private accommodation and breach of confidentiality as factors that directly reduce patronage of counseling services by students. Others fall to the opposite extreme. They become so secretive that they never give any feedback. A principal refers a troubled student to you and you never say thank you, I have seen her, she is improving, please support by giving her more time in your class. So the principal thinks you did nothing. You must learn to give process feedback without breaking content. Documentation also matters more than many counselors think. You counsel fifteen students in a week but have no records, no report, no case note. At the end of term when everyone presents their work, you have nothing to show except talk. No wonder they ask what are you producing. Even simple anecdotal records protect your morale because they remind you and the school that work was done. Victim mentality and self isolation also drain morale. Staying alone in your corner, complaining that teachers do not like us and principals do not understand us, avoiding staff meetings and always looking like the suffering specialist. Morale goes down because you isolated yourself. Eboka (2016) found that morale is not only a function of leadership but also of interaction and sense of belonging within the school climate. Continuous growth cannot be ignored. Some finished guidance and counselling in 2012 and have not attended any CASSON workshop, have not read new material on adolescent anxiety, career counseling or trauma. They use 2012 knowledge for 2026 children who live on TikTok. When methods fail, they feel incompetent and morale drops. Okorji and Ogbo (2013) showed that modified clinical supervision that includes professional support and training improves instructional performance, a principle that applies equally to counseling competence. There is also the pressure of wanting quick results. Teaching shows results in one term. Counseling may take months. Expecting significant behavioral change after a single counseling encounter often results in counselor discouragement and attrition. This occurs because many school counselors evaluate their effectiveness using pedagogical metrics rather than therapeutic outcomes. Teaching yields observable results within a term, whereas counseling outcomes are often gradual, latent and non linear. When counselors internalize the teacher's ruler as a measure of counseling effectiveness, they experience perceived inefficacy which is a known precursor to burnout. This emotional overload, when managed without adequate professional boundaries, precipitates what Figley (1995) conceptualized as com-

passion fatigue, defined as the cost of caring for others in emotional pain. The school counselor carries clients' trauma home, ruminates on their narratives and lacks a peer debriefing mechanism. Over time, this prolonged exposure without self care and collegial support manifests in emotional exhaustion, irritability, depersonalization and resentment toward the same students the counselor initially sought to help. Maslach and Leiter (2016) described this pattern as the erosion of engagement, where energy turns into exhaustion and involvement turns into cynicism. Put simply, counsellors inadvertently erode their own morale through professional invisibility, role diffusion and passive professional identity formation, waiting for the institution to define them rather than assertively defining their professional role within the school system. Omoniyi (2016) argued that counseling in Nigeria has suffered from poor advocacy and role ambiguity, which leaves counsellors vulnerable to institutional misdefinition if they do not actively assert their professional identity. Rebuilding morale therefore requires intentional professional positioning. This involves proactive visibility by being present where students naturally congregate such as during break, assembly and career programs rather than waiting in the counselling office, a strategy advocated by the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA, 2019) as direct student services through intrusive outreach. It also requires protection of professional title and identity by ensuring consistent designation as school counsellor rather than subject teacher and correcting misdesignation assertively but collegially. Such title protection reinforces role clarity which Arowolo (2013) identified as a critical determinant of counseling effectiveness in Nigerian schools. Give summary reports monthly, no names, just numbers and themes, so the principal sees you are working. Join at least one CASSON training this year. And find one teacher ally, you do not need the whole staff to stay motivated. Guidance counselors in Imo State experience five interrelated forms of morale: professional morale threatened by role adulteration, psychological morale threatened by compassion fatigue, organizational morale threatened by lack of facilities, interpersonal morale threatened by principals' consideration deficiency, and achievement morale threatened by lack of recognition.

In literature, school counselors have been classified from three perspectives and a supervisor would expect knowledge of all three while adopting one as a theoretical lens. By level of practice which reflects the developmental model advanced by the American School Counselor Association and now reflected in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), counselors are differentiated according to the educational level served. At the elementary or primary level the emphasis is on preventive guidance, socialization, play based interventions and early identification of learning disabilities with minimal engagement in deep trauma work. The secondary school level which forms the focus of research in Imo State is concerned with career choice, West African Senior School Certificate Examination subject selection, adolescent crisis, examination anxiety, sexual behaviour and truancy and remains the most overloaded level in the Nigerian system. At the tertiary or college level the focus shifts to vocational placement, mental health crisis management, substance abuse and relationship concerns. By functional specialization which addresses what the counselor actually does, a classification originally articulated by Shertzer and Stone (1981) and later elaborated by Erford (2018) and widely adopted among Nigerian researchers, counselors are differentiated according to domain of service. The vocational or career counselor handles career fairs, subject selection, Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board combinations and the administration of career interest inventories such as Holland's RIASEC and in many schools in Imo State this represents the only function counselors are permitted to perform. The personal social or adjustment counselor addresses emotional and behavioral problems including bullying, grief, low self esteem, family dysfunction and sexual abuse which is the domain most associated with compassion fatigue. The educational or academic counselor focuses on study skills, underachievement, learning difficulties,

school phobia and time management and works closely with teachers. The rehabilitation or special needs counselor works within inclusive education supporting children with physical, intellectual or learning disabilities although such personnel are rarely posted to public secondary schools in Nigeria. In practice a single secondary school counselor in Imo State is expected to perform all four functions simultaneously and this role overload has been identified as a direct predictor of low morale (Lambie and Williamson, 2004). By work identity which is particularly relevant for understanding morale, a classification derived not from textbooks but from research observation in Nigerian schools and developed by scholars such as Aluede and Imahe (2002), counselors are differentiated according to how the institution defines them. The designated counselor is posted by the Post Primary Schools Management Board as a counselor, provided with an office and reflected on the timetable and may experience relatively high organizational morale although still vulnerable to psychological strain when overloaded. The teacher counselor or adulterated counselor is trained in guidance and counseling but assigned substantial teaching loads such as eighteen periods of English or Biology with counseling existing only on paper and Arowolo (2013) found that over sixty eight percent of counselors in Southwest Nigeria fell within this category which constitutes a major source of professional morale crisis. The accidental counselor or non professional has no training in guidance and counseling and is selected by the principal, often a teacher of Christian Religious Studies or Biology considered disciplined, and designated as counselor, a practice common in rural schools in Imo State and lacking ethical framework and techniques. The administrative counselor or principal counselor occurs when the principal assumes the counseling role which undermines student trust because the same person with powers of expulsion serves as confidant and violates the principle of confidentiality.

3 Methodology

This study adopted a predictive correlational survey design, considered appropriate for determining the extent to which principals' initiating structure and consideration leadership behaviors predict counselors' morale, and was carried out among secondary school counselors in two randomly selected Local Government Areas of Owerri Education Zone, Imo State, where the population comprised all 180 practising secondary school counselors in the two Local Government Areas, all of whom were studied using the census method given the manageable size of the population; data were collected using the researcher-developed Principals' Leadership Behavior and Counselors' Morale Questionnaire (PLBCMQ), a 24-item four-point Likert-scale instrument (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) comprising three sections, namely initiating structure, consideration, and counselors' morale, which was validated for face and content validity by three experts in Guidance and Counseling and Educational Management and trial-tested to yield Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .81, .84, and .87 for the three sections respectively; the questionnaire was administered directly to the counsellors by the researcher with the assistance of zonal guidance and counseling supervisors, and the resulting data were analyzed using simple linear regression to answer the two research questions, with R, R^2 and Adjusted R^2 used to determine the proportion of variance in counselors' morale accounted for by each leadership dimension separately, while the two null hypotheses were tested using the regression ANOVA F-test at the .05 level of significance, with a hypothesis rejected where the computed p-value was less than .05.

4 Presentation of results

Research Question 1: To what extent does principals' initiating structure leadership behavior predict counselors' morale?

The regression model summary for Research Question 1 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Extent to which principals' initiating structure leadership behaviour predicts counsellors' morale.

Variables	*N*	*R*	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error
Initiating Structure leadership Behavior	180	.386	.149	.144	.587
Counselors' Morale					

Table 1 shows that principals' initiating structure leadership behavior has a correlation coefficient of R = .386 with counselors' morale. The coefficient of determination, R^2 = .149, indicates that initiating structure accounts for 14.9% of the variance in counsellors' morale. The adjusted R^2 of .144 shows that approximately 14.4% of the variance is explained after adjustment for sample size. This indicates that principals' initiating structure leadership behavior contributes to predicting counsellors' morale.

H_{01}: Principals' initiating structure leadership behavior does not significantly predict counselors' morale.

The regression ANOVA for Hypothesis 1 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of regression ANOVA on the prediction of counsellors' morale by principals' initiating structure leadership behaviour.

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	*p*-value
Regression	10.75	1	10.75	31.19	.000
Residual	61.35	178	.345		
Total	72.10	179			

Table 2 shows that principals' initiating structure leadership behavior significantly predicts counselors' morale, $F(1, 178) = 31.19$, $p < .001$. Since the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, principals' initiating structure leadership behavior makes a statistically significant contribution to predicting counselors' morale. This finding indicates that higher levels of initiating structure leadership behaviour are associated with higher levels of counselors' morale.

Research Question 2: To what extent does principals' consideration leadership behavior predict counselors' morale?

The regression model summary for Research Question 2 is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Extent to which principals' consideration leadership behaviour predicts counsellors' morale.

Variables	*N*	*R*	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error
Consideration Leadership Behavior	180	.612	.375	.371	.471
Counselors' Morale					

Table 3 shows that principals' consideration leadership behavior has a correlation coefficient of R = .612 with counsellors' morale. The coefficient of determination, R^2 = .375, indicates that consideration leadership behavior accounts for 37.5% of the variance in counselors' morale. The adjusted R^2 of .371 shows that approximately 37.1% of the variance is explained after adjustment for sample size. This indicates that principals' consideration leadership behaviour contributes substantially to predicting counsellors' morale.

H_{02}: Principals' consideration leadership behavior does not significantly predict counselors' morale.

The regression ANOVA for Hypothesis 2 is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of regression ANOVA on the prediction of counsellors' morale by principals' consideration leadership behaviour.

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	*p*-value
Regression	23.66	1	23.66	106.68	.000
Residual	39.46	178	.222		
Total	63.12	179			

Table 4 shows that principals' consideration leadership behavior significantly predicts counselors' morale, F(1, 178) = 106.68, p < .001. Since the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, principals' consideration leadership behavior makes a statistically significant contribution to predicting counsellors' morale. The positive standardized beta coefficient (β = .612) further indicates that higher consideration leadership behavior is associated with higher counselor morale. Its predictive relationship is stronger than that of initiating structure leadership behavior in the results presented.

5 Discussion of the findings

The finding from Research Question One revealed that principals' initiating structure leadership behavior predicts counselors' morale to a low but meaningful extent, with R = .386 and R^2 = .149. This indicates that initiating structure accounts for 14.9% of the variance in counselors' morale, while the remaining 85.1% is attributable to other factors not captured by this variable. This moderate positive relationship suggests that when principals clearly define roles, establish communication channels, set performance standards, organize work procedures and emphasize goal attainment - which are core dimensions of initiating structure - counselors tend to experience higher morale. In essence, counselors feel more secure, focused and motivated when there is clarity of expectations and structured direction from the principal. The regression analysis further confirmed that this predictive relationship is statistically significant, F(1, 178) = 31.19, p < .001. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, implying that the observed relationship is not due to chance but reflects a genuine effect of leadership behavior on morale. This finding is consistent with path-goal theory and previous leadership studies which posit that task-oriented leadership reduces role ambiguity and provides psychological structure. When counselors understand what is expected of them, how their counseling roles align with school goals and what standards they are to meet, they develop a stronger sense of purpose and professional efficacy. For instance, a principal who schedules regular guidance meetings, provides a clear counseling timetable and ensures counselors have access to necessary resources creates a work environment that enhances morale. However, the fact that only

14.9% of variance is explained indicates that initiating structure alone is not sufficient to sustain high morale. Other factors such as consideration behavior, work conditions, recognition and interpersonal relationships likely account for the larger proportion. This aligns with the morale literature which emphasizes that while structure provides direction, morale is also deeply affective and requires supportive human relations. Furthermore, in the context of Owerri Education Zone where secondary school counselors often face role conflict through assignment of teaching loads and administrative duties outside their counselling mandate, initiating structure becomes particularly crucial. A principal who protects counseling time, defines job boundaries and organizes referral systems helps counsellors maintain professional identity, which directly boosts morale. The finding that initiating structure significantly predicted counselors' morale while accounting for only 14.9% of its variance is consistent with previous studies that reported significant but modest effects of task-oriented leadership on staff morale. It also supports the view that when initiating structure becomes the dominant or sole leadership behaviour, it tends to improve procedural compliance without generating substantial morale gains that come from feeling valued and supported.

The finding that consideration behaviour was a substantially stronger predictor, accounting for more than double the variance explained by initiating structure, directly corroborates Okafor, Umeh, and Nnamdi (2022), whose regression analysis similarly found consideration to outpredict initiating structure, in their case for organizational commitment, and aligns closely with Ibekwe and Chukwuemeka's (2021) finding of a significant positive relationship between principals' interpersonal consideration and counsellors' job satisfaction, a construct with substantial conceptual overlap with morale which may reflect something specific to the counseling role: unlike classroom teaching, whose structure is heavily externally prescribed by curriculum and timetable regardless of principal behavior, counseling work is comparatively under-structured and discretionary in Nigerian secondary schools, so counselors may depend more than teachers do on a principal's personal regard and encouragement to sustain their sense of purpose, which would explain why consideration carries unusually strong predictive weight for this particular occupational group.

The finding from Research Question Two revealed that principals' consideration leadership behavior is a strong predictor of counselors' morale, with $R = .612$ and $R^2 = .375$. This indicates that consideration alone accounts for 37.5% of the variance in counselors' morale, which is substantial in the behavioral sciences. The ANOVA result, $F(1, 178) = 106.68$, $p < .001$, confirms that this prediction is highly significant. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = .612$ further indicates a strong positive direction: as principals display more consideration, counselors' morale increases significantly. Consideration behavior, which involves showing mutual trust, warmth, respect, concern for welfare, open communication and participative decision-making, appears to touch the affective core of morale. Unlike initiating structure which provides clarity, consideration provides emotional support and professional validation. For school counsellors who often experience isolation, role ambiguity and lack of recognition, a principal who listens to their concerns, appreciates their counseling efforts, involves them in school decisions and shows genuine concern for their personal and professional well-being directly enhances their sense of belonging and motivation. This finding aligns with the human relations theory of leadership and Herzberg's two-factor theory, which emphasize that interpersonal relations and recognition are powerful motivators. It is also consistent with Okorji and Ogbo (2013) who, although focusing on instructional performance, demonstrated that when supervision incorporates supportive, humane and collaborative elements - markers of consideration - teachers showed greater commitment and improved performance compared to when supervision was purely task-focused. The present finding suggests that this

supportive effect extends strongly to counselors' morale. When compared with Research Question One, consideration (37.5%) predicted more than twice the variance explained by initiating structure (14.9%). This indicates that while counselors need structure to understand what to do, they need consideration to want to do it well. The relationship between the two leadership dimensions and morale may therefore not be simply additive. A principal who is high on initiating structure but low on consideration may achieve orderly counselling operations without achieving a genuinely motivated counseling staff. Conversely, a balance of both behaviors is likely optimal, with consideration serving as the stronger driver of morale.

Taken together, both leadership dimensions matter, and neither should be treated as expendable, but the clear asymmetry in predictive strength indicates that principal training programs aimed at improving counselors' morale are likely to see the larger return by strengthening principals' consideration behaviors specifically, rather than by treating leadership development as a generic, undifferentiated exercise. This distinction, made possible by the predictive correlational design's separation of the two dimensions, would not have been visible had leadership behavior been analyzed as a single composite construct, underscoring the practical value of disaggregating leadership behavior in future counselor-morale research.

When both findings are juxtaposed, a clear pattern emerges (Table 5).

Table 5. Combined comparison of consideration and initiating structure.

Predictor	*R*	R^2	%Variance Explained
Initiating Structure	.386	.149	14.9%
Consideration	.612	.375	37.5%

Consideration behavior predicted more than twice the variance in morale compared to initiating structure (37.5% vs 14.9%). Its F-value (106.68) is also more than three times higher than that of initiating structure (31.19). This suggests that while counselors need structure to know what to do, they need consideration to want to do it well. In the Nigerian secondary school context where counsellors are often deployed without functional counseling centres, with high student-counselor ratios and limited resources, emotional support from the principal becomes a critical buffer against burnout and low morale. A principal may define tasks perfectly, but if he or she is autocratic, uncaring, and non-supportive, morale remains low. This is consistent with the Ohio State Leadership Studies which originally identified consideration and initiating structure as two independent dimensions, but found consideration to be more strongly related to follower satisfaction and morale, while initiating structure was more related to performance.

6 Conclusion

This study established that both principals' initiating structure and consideration leadership behaviors significantly and positively predict counselors' morale in secondary schools, but that consideration behavior is the markedly stronger predictor of the two. These findings indicate that while task-oriented structuring of counselors' work contributes meaningfully to their morale, it is the relationship-oriented, welfare-focused dimension of principal leadership that carries the greater weight in sustaining counselors' morale.

7 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Principal training and continuing professional development programs should place particular emphasis on consideration behaviors, such as approachability, active listening, and recognition of counselors' welfare, given their stronger predictive weight for morale.
- Principals should nonetheless maintain adequate initiating structure, including clear role definitions and organized scheduling, to provide the operational floor on which counselors' morale can be built.
- Ministries of Education and school management boards should incorporate leadership-behaviour assessments, covering both dimensions, into principal appraisal and promotion processes.
- Zonal guidance and counseling supervisors should periodically survey counselors' morale as an early indicator of leadership-related strain within a school.
- Further research should test a combined multiple regression model incorporating both leadership dimensions simultaneously, alongside other predictors such as years of principal-counselor working relationship, to clarify their joint and relative contributions to morale.

7.1 Implications of the findings

- The result implies that principals should not assume counselors will function effectively without deliberate structuring. Training principals in task-oriented skills such as goal setting, role clarification and work organization could serve as a low-cost intervention for improving counselor morale.
- To enhance counselors' morale in Owerri Education Zone, principals should prioritize consideration behaviors such as recognition, approachability, active listening and involvement of counselors in decision-making. Training programs for principals should therefore emphasize human relations skills alongside task organization skills.

If principals aim to improve counselors' morale, investment in human-oriented leadership behaviors - such as showing personal interest, recognizing achievements, encouraging open dialogue, and supporting counsellors' professional development - will yield higher returns than merely emphasizing task organization and rules. Effective leadership for counsellor morale therefore requires a balance, but with a deliberate emphasis on consideration.

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