

# Information: A Panacea for Decision-Making and Problem Solving in Counselling

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines information: a panacea for decision-making and problem solving in counseling. It was guided by three hypotheses, utilizing a descriptive survey research design; the study targeted a population of 340 members from the Counselling Association of Nigeria, Edo State Chapter (CASSON), and 250 members from the Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria, Edo State Chapter (APROCON). A purposeful sampling technique was used to select 185 participants for the study. Data analysis was performed using mean, standard deviation, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings indicate that information is a key factor in decision-making and problem-solving in counselling contexts. Specifically, the second hypothesis revealed that the majority of respondents fell within the age range of 38-47, with an F-ratio of  $(F(2,182)=4.053, p<.05)$ , suggesting that age influences how information affects decision-making and problem-solving. In contrast, the third hypothesis, with an F-ratio of  $(F(2,182)=.429, p>.05)$ , showed no significant difference in decision-making and problem-solving based on academic qualifications, indicating that academic background does not significantly influence these processes among participants. The implications of this study highlight the essential role of information in human existence, as it is necessary for effective problem-solving and decision-making in daily life. Therefore, counsellors are encouraged to foster positive attitudes towards appropriate information needs and to emphasize the importance of adhering to information characteristics to enhance service delivery in decision-making and problem-solving. The study also recommends that counsellors actively identify and understand their clients' situations to determine the specific information needed to address the diverse challenges clients face, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of their decision-making and problem-solving capabilities.

**Keywords:** Information, Age, Academic qualification, Decision-making, Problem solving, Counselling

## INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly changing world, basic education is essential for an individual being able to access and apply information (Eneremadu & Ndubuaku, 2024). Information as we all know is very essential and a powerful resource for our daily living as human beings. We cannot do without it. Information as a resource is in the life of every individual human being and nations (Adebayo, 2002). It is vital in every aspect of our daily living, counselling clients, and an essential part of a nation's development. It is not only vital for scientific, technological and economic advancement, but also for educational, cultural and social transformation in any society (Anyin, 2021).

In today's information age, the economies of advanced and industrialized nations are flourishing, largely because they are driven by information. This makes information essential for the overall development of

individuals and societies. Counselors play a crucial role in harnessing this information to positively impact lives. They seek, receive, manage, and utilize information daily to help clients become more informed and knowledgeable about global events (Bashiru, 2009).

Chaudhuri, Dukovska-Popovska, Subramanian, Chan & Bai (2018) reaffirmed that information is knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance; news: information concerning a crime. Synonyms: advice, intelligence, data. (Aremu, 2002) added that it is knowledge gained through study, communication, research, instruction, or knowledge obtained from investigation, study, or instruction. (Kelton, Pennington & Tuttle, 2010) avows that there is need for information gathering for use in providing counselling services. Information gathering is a systematic approach to collecting, organizing, and analyzing data that incorporates planning, quality control, and stakeholder involvement, it's fundamental for informed decision-making and comprehensive research. (Nach & Lejeune, 2010) supported this view of assessment that the information-gathering paradigm, become the goal use to collect data that will aid in communication, problem solving and decision making about clients. This contrasts with the therapeutic model of assessment, is the major goal to produce positive change in clients (Shepherd, Williams & Patzelt, 2015).

Provost & Fawcett (2013) affirmed that counselling Problem-solving is a therapy aims to help individuals adopt a realistically optimistic view of coping, understand the role of emotions more effectively, and creatively develop an action plan geared to reduce psychological distress and enhance well-being.

Tomić (2023) emphasized that there is decision making process in counselling, which is an approach that envisions counselling as a process with three stages: the problem definition phase, the work phase, and the action phase. The problem definition phase considers alternative definitions of the client's presenting problem and encourages them to commit to one of these. During the work phase, the counsellor helps the client to look at the problem from different perspectives and to consider solutions to it. In the action phase, the client chooses a solution and tests it in the home environment. (Song & Song, 2010) suggested that during counselling sessions, the client is encouraged to express his feelings and emotions. By discussing his concerns with you, the counsellor can help him gain a better understanding of his feelings and thought processes, as well as identifying ways of finding solutions to the problems. (Reitz, 2004) stated that this will not be possible without the decisional counselling theory, which is however, conceptualized as a process where individuals are guided through the collection and integration of varied information about themselves as the world or work, followed by a rational process of decision making. It is against this backdrop that study examines information: a panacea for decision-making and problem solving in counselling.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

### Conceptual Issues

The term information has been variously defined in the literature. Information as a concept has many meanings or definitions to scholars. However, generally speaking information is knowledge derived from experience, instruction or study. Utor and Utor (2007) defined information to refer to facts and opinions provided and received during the course of daily life. Reitz (2004) sees information as "data of value in planning, decision-making and evaluation of program..".

Also in defining information, Wyorkson and Obasuyi (2010) are of the view that information is something which our senses can detect/feel either directly or with the assistance of a device. Reitz (2004) posited that information is ideas and creative works of the human intellect and imagination that have been communicated either formally or informally in any form. Related to Reitz's view is the definition given by Song et. al., (2010) that information is the "act of informing" and of course the act of informing entails sending out ideas or messages. Information according to Shepherd, et. al., (2015) is "any stimulus that reduces uncertainty". This definition is in line with the generally accepted opinion that information is anything that causes a change or alteration in the mind of an individual or group of individuals when a message is received or transmitted. In whatever way one would look at information, the researcher is of the opinion that information

is that thing that is conveyed to the mind, which adds to ones experiences and or knowledge and a sine qua non to effective decision-making and development. This is supported by Nach et. al., (2010) who posited that information is data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering a user's query, be it recorded, summarized, or simply collected that would help decision-making. Information therefore is an important resource in all human activities and progress for all fields of human endeavours.

Information is an intangible as well as tangible resource even though it is not readily quantifiable. Information as a resource is however different from most other resources because is not lost when given out and does not decrease when consumed. Sharing will even always cause it to increase. Information is a valuable resource (tangible or intangible) to individuals, societies, nations etc. because of its power to bring about innovation and change.

Information is of potential value just like any other resource that is of great economic value to human existence. It has been recognized as an important development resource and it is acknowledged that the absence of it (information) may impede development and progress. Information therefore is an important and of course inevitable resource in our everyday life because we use it in solving problems, in decision-making in order to develop, improve, and advance our social, political, economic, cultural, scientific/technological situations. If this is the case, then information must have some special characteristics that are to be considered so that we may be well guided on the type of information we acquire and use towards achieving set goals and objectives.

### **Characteristics of Information**

Wyorkson and Obasuyi (2010) posited the following as characteristics of information:

Relevance  
Accuracy  
Timeliness  
Cost-effectiveness  
Quality  
Reliability  
Usability  
Exhaustiveness/Completeness

However, scholars have identified five major characteristics of information as follows:

1. Relevance
2. Completeness
3. Accuracy
4. Currency
5. Economical

**Relevance:** This is very essential because the information to be used must be relevant or related to the problem at hand; otherwise it would not in any way help in solving the problem. Information is relevant if it is useful and leads to improved decision-making and solving problems. The library for instance collects and makes available relevant materials/information to both the present and future users, be them scholars, researchers, educators, politicians, etc. The extent to which these groups of people use information will also determine the usefulness of information as a development resource in meeting their needs.

**Completeness:** This entails that the information should be comprehensive, exhaustive and adequate enough to be used in solving problems or decision-making. Information must therefore be complete because if incomplete or only partial information is received and used, it may lead to making wrong decisions or not solving the problem at hand. Libraries provide information resources to improve social conditions and

therefore librarians should be well focused in this regard because the library is the only democratic institution that allows people of all background and abilities to receive the full benefits of information and knowledge. The public library for example is an educational, entertainment, informative and cultural tool and acts as a clearing house for community information and resources towards helping the public to get answers to questions in different fields or subject area Accuracy: This refers to the reliability of the information i.e. how correct and verifiable is the information to be used in order not to take wrong decisions which may even compound the problem(s). Complete and accurate information is essential for making informed and timely decisions, but inaccurate information for example on the international market price of oil may affect the efficient and effective budgeting and implementation of our National Budget. Scholarly information is an example of accurate information in view of the fact that these are information received from scholars and researchers and are authentic and can be relied upon for decision-making, problem solving and planning.

Currency: This also refers to timeliness. Information should be up-to-date or current in all its ramifications because current information is essential in decision-making or in solving problems. This is in view of the fact that, a fact of yesterday may not necessary be a fact today or tomorrow. Information is not something that is absolute. Information/knowledge is dynamic not static. Advances are always taking place in every discipline especially in the sciences, so a good library or information centre should always have up-to-date information and information resources so that patrons can always get the right information at the right time. With the import of technology the world is witnessing tremendous information explosion. There is the urge on the part of scholars, researchers, scientists, specialists, policy makers, etc, to want to know what is very current in their areas of interests. This is necessitated by the desire to be up-to-date and to improve services and also avoid duplication of research efforts. In this regard the importance of current awareness service (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI) cannot be under estimated.

Economical: Also known as cost-effectiveness is very important in view of saving or cutting costs. Cost of acquiring information must usually be compared with the benefits to be obtained from usage. This cost-effectiveness characteristic is very essential especially in profit-oriented organizations in order to safe-guard losses. The application of information communication technologies in information handling has now greatly enhanced cost-effectiveness in the information industry.

Quality: Apart from these five major characteristics of information mentioned above, another characteristic worth mentioning or considering is quality. The issue here is quality and therefore quantity should not even be thought of, because 'more' here may not be better. Quality information is authenticated facts and therefore there is objectivity and not subjectivity in such information. Authentic and objective information enhances good decision-making and problem solving. Quality information is needed to support the decisions that must be made if an organization is to be successful. Information is what is capable of yielding knowledge and therefore great attention should be paid to the quality of information and information resources to be acquired for usage. If information is of high demand, then it means that the information is of high quality. Demand and quality complement each other. Library and information centres while trying to satisfy existing information demands should also anticipate future demands.

### **What is information giving in counselling**

Information-giving is a means of communication that should not be confused with 'giving advice'. Information-giving can provide an individual with strategies that enable them to address their problems. Information-giving promotes choice, rather than being dictatorial and over-authoritarian (Tomić, 2023).

Information-giving is a means of communication that should not be confused with 'giving advice'. Information-giving can provide an individual with strategies that enable them to address their problems. Information-giving promotes choice, rather than being dictatorial and over-authoritarian. For individuals who grew up with authoritarian critical parents, and who experienced authoritarian regimes and bullying at school or at work, information-giving can help to build confidence and encourage thinking more

productively about how to resolve their problems. Supportive group work programmes about assertiveness, parenting skills, and programmes within children's centres give service users information to help them acquire skills and gain confidence (Anyin, 2021).

### **Role of information in decision making in counselling**

Information is vital in the decision-making process, providing the foundation for informed choices (Wyorkson et al., 2010). It enables individuals and organizations to make decisions based on accurate and relevant data. Here are some key ways in which information serves as a solution for decision-making and problem-solving in counselling:

1. **Understanding the Client's Situation:** Counselors rely on information to gain a comprehensive understanding of their clients' backgrounds, experiences, and challenges. This information serves as the foundation for developing effective counseling strategies tailored to the client's needs.
2. **Assessment and Diagnosis:** Information gathering is crucial for conducting assessments and making accurate diagnoses. Counsellors utilize various tools and techniques to gather information about the client's mental health, emotional well-being, and interpersonal dynamics, which guides the formulation of treatment plans.
3. **Identifying Goals and Objectives:** Through information exchange, counselors and clients collaboratively identify goals and objectives for counselling. Clear communication and sharing of relevant information help establish realistic expectations and benchmarks for progress.
4. **Exploring Options and Strategies:** Information empowers clients to explore different options and strategies for addressing their concerns. Counsellors provide information about available resources, interventions, and coping skills, enabling clients to make informed decisions about their path forward.
5. **Facilitating Insight and Awareness:** Sharing relevant information with clients can facilitate insight and awareness into their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. By providing psycho-education and feedback based on gathered information, counsellors help clients gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their circumstances.
6. **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making:** Information serves as a critical tool for problem-solving and decision-making in counselling. Counsellors guide clients through a structured process of gathering relevant information, evaluating options, considering consequences, and making informed choices to address challenges and achieve their goals.
7. **Empowerment and Autonomy:** Access to information empowers clients to take an active role in their own healing and growth process. By providing accurate and relevant information, counsellors foster client autonomy and self-efficacy, enabling them to make empowered decisions and solve problems effectively.
8. **Evaluation and Adjustment:** Information gathering continues throughout the counselling process to evaluate progress and make necessary adjustments to treatment plans. Counsellors regularly collect feedback, monitor outcomes, and assess the effectiveness of interventions, using this information to refine their approach and ensure optimal client care.

### **Different decision-making models**

There are several different decision-making models that can be used, depending on the situation and type of problem. Some of the most commonly used models include:

1. **Rational Decision-Making Model:** This model assumes that individuals make decisions based on logic and careful consideration of available options. It involves a systematic, step-by-step process of gathering information, evaluating alternatives, and choosing the best option.
2. **Bounded Rationality Model:** This model recognizes that individuals have limited time, information, and cognitive resources, and therefore make decisions that are "good enough" rather than perfectly rational.

3. Intuitive Decision-Making Model: This model asserts that individuals rely on past experiences, gut feelings, and instincts to make quick decisions without a lot of conscious thought.
4. Satisficing Model: This model suggests that individuals make decisions by selecting the first alternative that meets their minimum criteria, rather than evaluating all options thoroughly.
5. Incremental Decision-Making Model: This model involves making small, gradual changes to an existing situation rather than making a radical change.
6. Group Decision-Making Model: This model involves a group of individuals coming together to make a decision, taking into account the perspectives and opinions of all group members.
7. Political Decision-Making Model: This model recognizes that political factors, such as power relationships, can influence the decision-making process.
8. Satisfaction Model: This model asserts that individuals make decisions based on the level of satisfaction or happiness they expect to receive from a particular choice.

Each of these models has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of which model to use will depend on the specific situation and problem at hand.

### **Research objectives**

The following research objectives guided the study

1. To examine the influence information has on decision making and problem solving on counselling in Edo State?
2. To examine information on decision making and problem solving of counsellors based on age in Edo State.
3. To examine information on decision making and problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification in Edo State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study

Hypothesis one: there is no significant relationship between information and decision making, problem solving on counselling in Edo State.

Hypothesis two: there is no significant relationship between information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on age in Edo State.

Hypothesis three: there is no significant relationship between information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification in Edo State.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a descriptive research design of survey type. The population for this study consists of all the 340 members of Counselling Association of Nigeria Edo State Chapter (CASSON) and 250 members of Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) Edo State Chapter. A purposeful sampling technique was employed in the study which is a flexible and targeted sampling strategy that allows researchers to strategically select participants or cases to meet the specific goals and objectives of their qualitative research study. One hundred and eighty-five (185) members were sampled across the two associations in Edo state chapter.

The major instrument used for gathering data from the respondent is a validated instrument titled "Questionnaire on Information and Decision Making/Problem Solving (IDPS). The instrument was developed by the researcher and was used to gather information for the study. The instrument was content-

validated by experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined through test-retest reliability of 0.76 reliability coefficient. The questionnaire is structured with close-ended items and its responses are patterned on a Four Point Likert-type Rating Scale, which stated Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire is divided into three sections (A B, C). The first section comprises the demographic data of the respondents such as age, and educational qualifications, Section B comprises items on domestic violence while section C comprises items on marital stability.

Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## RESULTS

The main purpose of the study was to determine information: a panacea for decision-making and problem solving in counselling. Data analysis was done on a total of 185 questionnaires that were properly filled and accounted for and used for this study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in analyzing the collected data. The demographic data of the respondents were done using simple percentage distribution, Pearson Product Moment correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesis one at 0.05 alpha level of significance, while Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis two and three respectively.

### Demographic Data

This section presents the results of data obtained on the respondents in frequency counts and percentages.

Table 1: Percentage of Distribution of Respondents Based on Age.

AGE	Frequency	Percentage (%)
28-37	12	6.5
38-47	80	43.2
48-52	50	27.0
53-67	43	23.2
TOTAL	185	100.0

Table 1 above indicated that 12 respondents, corresponding to 6.5%, are within the age range 28-37, 80 respondents corresponding to 43.2%, are within the age range of 38-47, 50 respondents corresponding to 27.0%, are within the age range of 48-52, while 43 respondents corresponding to 23.2% are within the age range of 53-67, making a total of 185 respondents, corresponding to 100%. This imply that the four groups were represented in the distribution having the highest age bracket of 38-47 (43.2%) followed by 48-52 (27.0%), 53-67(23.2%) and 28-37 (6.5%) respectively.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
B.sc	46	24.9
M.Ed	105	56.8
PhD	32	17.3
OTHERS	02	1.1
TOTAL	185	100.0

Table 2 above show that 46 respondents, corresponding 24.9%, acquired B.sc qualification, 105respondents, corresponding to 56.8%, are M.Ed, 32 respondents, corresponding to 17.3%, are PhD, while those that acquired other qualifications, 2 corresponding to 1.1%, making a total of 185 respondents corresponding to 100%.

## Hypothesis Testing

The three research hypotheses postulated for this study were tested at 0.05 alpha levels.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between information and decision making, problem solving of counsellors in Edo State

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlation between information and decision making, problem solving of counsellors in Edo state

Variables	N	X	SD	df	R Value	P level
Information	185	3.52	.643	181	-.062	0.195
Decision Making, Problem Solving	185	3.36	.582			

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 indicates that the calculated r-value is  $-.062$  and 183 degrees of freedom, with a corresponding p-value of  $0.195$ , which is not less than  $0.05$  level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than the alpha level, the null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between Information and decision making, problem solving of members of Counselling Association of Nigeria Edo State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on age in Edo state

Table 4: Analysis of Variance showing the information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on age in Edo state

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig	Remark
Between Groups	6.918	2	3.459	4.053	.019	S
Within Groups	155.320	182	8.53			
Total	162.238	181				

From the analysis of variance in Table 4, there is a significant difference in the information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on age. The F-ratio ( $F(2,182) = 4.053, P < .05$ ) further affirms the significance of the finding. This implies that age is a factor affecting information and decision making/problem solving; hence there is a significant difference in information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on age. Therefore, hypothesis two is rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification in Edo State.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance showing the information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification in Edo State

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig	Remark
Between Groups	.470	2	.235	.429	.652	NS
Within Groups	99.908	182	549			
Total	100.378	184				



From the analysis of variance in Table 5, there is no significant difference in information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification in Edo state. The F-ratio ( $F(2, 182) = 4.29, P > .05$ ). Since the P value is greater than the significant level, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification in Edo state. This further implies that academic qualification does not determine the information and decision making/problem solving of the participants.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined information: a panacea for decision-making and problem solving in counselling in Edo State. The findings revealed that information is one of the major factors that contribute to decision making/problem solving of members of Counselling Association of Nigeria Edo State. This finding partly supported that of (Nwibom & Nwinyokpugi, 2023) who found a significant positive relationship between information audit strategies and decision making success of tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Finding from the response to hypothesis two reveal that the majority of the respondents were within the age range of 38-47 and they are all educated. The result implies that age is significant to information needed for decision making/problem solving. This finding is similar to that of (Delaney, Strough, Parker & Bruine, 2016) that age significantly predicted profile membership and growing older by one year was associated with 1% increased being in the affective experiential profile and self-controlled profile for decision making.

The response to hypothesis three, finding reveals that there is no significant difference in the information and decision making/problem solving of counsellors based on academic qualification. The implication is that the level of education is not a yardstick in determining information needs for decision making/problem solving. This contradicts the finding of (Ahmad, 2018) who believe that education helps more in influencing, modification and enhancement of thinking for better delivery of services, saying that those without education or with low education will not deliver maximally in counselling services as a lot of flaws will certainly be on hand to deal with.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING/COUNSELLING INTERVENTIONS

As human beings we cannot exist meaningfully with the absence of information because whatever we do information is needed. We need information for problem solving and decision-making and these are part and parcel of our daily life. Based on the findings of this study, counsellors should focus on improving clients' ability to seek, evaluate, and utilize information effectively as well as understanding the specific information needs will empower clients to make informed decisions about their lives.

Counsellors should customize their interventions to be age-specific, acknowledging that different age groups have unique information and support needs shaped by their life experiences and developmental stages. By understanding the developmental milestones associated with each age group, counsellors can identify relevant information that effectively addresses clients' current challenges.

Counsellors should recognize the value of practical experience alongside academic qualifications. Training programs can focus on real-world applications and hands-on learning to enhance skills and continuous professional development should be encouraged, emphasizing that ongoing education and training are critical for all counsellors, regardless of their academic background.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of information in decision-making and problem-solving within the counselling context. Information not only serves as a foundational element that guides counsellors and clients alike but also highlights the necessity of tailoring this information to meet the distinct needs of different age groups. The significant influence of age on the types of information required emphasizes the importance of understanding developmental stages and life experiences when providing

counselling support. Additionally, the lack of significant difference in the decision-making and problem-solving abilities of counselors based on academic qualifications suggests that practical experience and continuous professional development are equally, if not more, important than formal education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Counsellors should identify and understanding the client's situation so as to know the information needed to manage the numerous differences in client's problems so as to be efficiently and effectively in decision-making and problem-solving.
2. Counsellors should know that attaining right age will assist in where to assess the information as this is significant to information needs for decision making/problem solving in counselling services.
3. Counselling psychologists should understand that academic qualification is good but beyond that it is important that counsellors should be well informed which is beyond academic qualification as there are many educated people who are not properly informed concerning the right information for decision making/problem solving of the clients.

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