

Counselling Skills as a Tool for the Accompaniment of the Candidates in Initial Formation Among the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Province of Congo

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Abstract:- This study is focused on Counselling skills as a tool for the accompaniment of the candidates in initial formation among the oblates of the Province of Congo. The theory used was person centred approach. The study adopted convergent parallel design which is quantitative and qualitative in nature. The main objective was to explore how counselling skills as a tool for accompaniment could be effectively applied to the formation of candidates in the Province of Congo. Five research questions guided the study. The target population was 82. The sampling size was 67 participants from Oblate formators: 15; Oblate scholastics in philosophy 12; Oblate scholastics in theology 24; Oblate pre-novices 10; Oblate novices 6. The study used structured questionnaire designed instrument to obtain both open-ended and closed questions. The study used Microsoft Excel Program that generated results through tables and charts in order to analyse quantitative data while qualitative data was coded and analysed in a narrative form using research question themes. The quantitative information is obtained through the close ended questions and qualitative information is obtained through the open ended questions in the questionnaire. The findings of the research indicate that counselling skills are a tool that can assist the formators to make perfect the practice of the accompaniment as spiritual directors. All the respondents agreed that counselling skills are to be integrated in the spiritual accompaniment because spiritual accompaniment without counselling skills is limited. Respondents also affirmed that listening, empathy and unconditional positive regard are the main skills that are needed by the formators.

Keywords:- Counselling Skills, Accompaniment, Initial Formation, Listening, Empathy, Unconditional Positive Regard.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This work focused on the counselling skills as a tool for the accompaniment of the candidates in initial formation among the oblates of the Province of Congo. The congregation of Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) is a religious Congregation of pontifical right, composed of

brothers and priests devoted to the evangelization of the poor, founded in Aix-en-Provence in January 25, 1816 by Saint Eugene de Mazenod. He was a priest of the diocese of Marseille (1782-1861). The General Norms of Oblate Formation (GNOF) talks about formation of formators asserting that: “the formation of formator is absolutely necessary because formation ministry is first of all an art that requires some skills or competences.”¹

Accompaniment in the training in general is needed “Seminarians need to be accompanied in a personal way in the various stages of their journey by those entrusted with the work of formation.”² Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of accompaniment: “The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this art of accompaniment which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.”³ It is part of the vocational and spiritual journey of the candidate because “in the process of formation, it is necessary that the seminarian should know himself and let himself be known, relating to the formators with sincerity and transparency.”⁴ Personal accompaniment is an indispensable means of formation. In the accompaniment of the candidates formators and counsellors use skills in order to help them.

The skills of skills are considered as one of the most fundamental skills in counselling. It is essential for a therapist to develop this skill to a higher level. “We all possess this skill in some measure but it is essential for a skill trainer and a therapist to develop this skill to a high

¹ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, *The General Norms of Oblate Formation*, Rome, General House, 2012, 64.

² Congregation for the clergy, *The gift of the priestly vocation: Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, Vatican City Osservatore Romano, 2016, 44.

³ Francis (Pope), *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican city: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2016, 169.

⁴ Francis, *Address to Seminarians and Novices from Various Countries of the World on the Occasion of the Year of Faith* (6 July 2013): *Insegnamenti* I/2 (2013), 9.

level.”⁵ In the accompaniment encounter active listening is probably the most important activity that happens at any time in any session. In an ordinary conversation between two people there is rarely great listening. Listening is also more than simply hearing. “Real listening is something you do with your whole self. You have to hear what people are really saying beneath all the words. You have to pick up the messages that have a certain urgency and then respond to these nuances with further questions.”⁶ Someone can hear every word another person says, be in a position to repeat verbatim what was said and yet he may not have understood what the person was really trying to communicate.

Empathy can be beneficial for the client. “Empathy is not sympathy or feeling sorry for a client.”⁷ “Accurate empathic understanding implies that the therapist will sense clients’ feelings as if they were his or her own without becoming lost in those feelings. It is a way for therapists to hear the meanings expressed by their clients that often lie at the edge of their awareness.”⁸ Empathy helps clients pay attention and value their experiencing; change their perceptions of themselves, others, and the world; and it also helps them increase their confidence in making choices. Cultivating this attitude toward a client can encourage and push him to share his thoughts, feelings, and behaviours more openly with the therapist; it can increase the trust of client to himself and his/ her performance. In this sense it is a kind of stimulus to the client.

Unconditional positive regard: “the second attitude therapists need to communicate is deep and genuine caring for the client as a person,”⁹ It is not an attitude of “I’ll accept you when; rather, it is one of I’ll accept you as you are.”¹⁰ Acceptance is the recognition of clients’ rights to have their own beliefs and feelings; it is not the approval of all behavior. All overt behavior need not be approved of or accepted.¹¹ For Carl Rogers we all have two instinctual urges and desires that make unconditional positive regard an effective tool of therapy: - The drive towards socially constructive behaviour, or interacting effectively and positively with others; - The need for self-determination, or the right and responsibility to choose one’s own path.

Apart from the important skills such as listening, empathy, unconditional positive regard formators or counsellors may apply others techniques or microskills that

are complementary to the important skills and that can be used as tool for accompaniment by allowing the director to know the back ground and the client, to look into areas of his lives and determine which areas can impact and influence him; to know about the expectations of the client from, to determine what the client needs to obtain next from their services, to encourage people in a counselling session to give more details on their discussion; to reiterate or clarify any misinformation that might have occurred, to create an environment for their client so that the client feels that he has the capacity to trust the counsellor. It is difficult for formators use these skills if they are not trained properly. That is why Vita Consecrata (VC) asserts:

Formators will need to be integrated and actively interested in spirituality and other human sciences such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, morality and philosophy which empower them to know the human person. Seeing what is asked of formators, their training is therefore a necessity.¹²

In the same line, Souza writes: “the formators should have the necessary training and regular updating to be able to accompany the members in their efforts to identify their lives with Christ and acquire an intimacy with him.”¹³

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The problem addressed in this research is the knowledge about the importance of counselling skills among the formators in the province of Congo. The reality is that good number of formators that are supposed to help the candidates in initial formation are not trained on counselling skills in order to accompany the candidates as required. Some formators are posted to formation houses immediately after their ordination or their perpetual vows; some are appointed because of lack of personal. Therefore they do not know how to apply the counselling skills needed for the accompaniment of the candidates. That is why research shows clearly that: “Many priests and religious who give spiritual direction are not trained to offer the service properly ... sometimes someone is appointed by their superior to be a spiritual director because they have obedience.”¹⁴

It has been revealed that the lack of proper counselling skills among some formators affected the formation of the candidates. According to Blythe “since spiritual direction is faith-oriented practice, there is no standard regulation or licensing available. One can claim to offer spiritual direction. It is a really bad idea because if you do not have

⁵Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Psychological Counselling for Africa: Handbook of psychotherapy and cultural counselling in African contexts*, Nairobi, Cueva Press, First published 2014, 219.

⁶ Robert Coles, “The Inner Life of Executive Kids: A Conversation with Child Psychiatrist Robert Coles,” *Harvard Business Review* (November 2001): R0110A.

⁷ Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy (8th Ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Thompson Brooks/Cole. (2009), 175.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 174.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹Cf. Ibid.

¹² John Paul II, (Pope), *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World*, Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1996, 66.

¹³ Cyril de Souza, *Ongoing formation of religious*. Rome, January 2007, <https://cmglobal.org/en/files/2018/06/VT-2008-0102-15-ENG-C.DE-SOUZA.pdf>

¹⁴ Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Counselling and psychotherapy skills, A practical Guide for Spiritual Direction*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2019, 13.

training (either by apprenticing or attending a formation or training program) you can do significant harm.”¹⁵ The lack of skills leads formators to focus only on spiritual life, excluding other aspects of human being. Research shows that “some of the priest and religious do not have the skill to journey with directees, and therefore they send the directees to go and pray, to read the scripture and the lives of the saint.”¹⁶ When formators are not trained on counselling skills, they ignore them and they may have some difficulties to help the candidates to grow in their spiritual journey. Some formators miss their role as director because they are so much influenced by the old model of doing accompaniment which has been transmitted from one generation to another in formation houses which is not demanding and at the same time they avoid the new model; which is professional, very demanding and guided by a certain code of ethical standard and uses some tools such as counselling skills to help the candidate. So they apply just what their formators have been doing or what has been passed on to them from the previous generations.¹⁷

The lack of tools can make the job become complicated and hard. So these tools which are counselling skills can help formators in the accompaniment of the candidates and can place formators and candidates before their own responsibility. The lack of these tools jeopardises the accompaniment which is a great and an important part of formation. Pastores dabo vobis says PDV: “Hence, the need for every formator to possess, in due measure, the sensitivity and psychological preparation that will allow him, insofar as possible, to perceive the candidate's true motivations, to discern the barriers that stop him integrating human and Christian maturity, and to pick up on any psychopathic disturbances present in the candidate.”¹⁸

➤ *Research objectives*

To explore how counselling skills as a tool for accompaniment could be effectively applied to the formation of candidates in the Province of Congo.

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

This study was grounded on theory of person-centered therapy that was developed by Carl Rogers. At the beginning it was called non directive therapy. Rogers started mentioning the name person-centered approach to talk about the efficiency of applying this theory beyond common individual psychotherapy.

¹⁵ Teresa Blythe, *How to become spiritual director*, 2012, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/spiritualdirection101/2012/11/how-to-become-a-spiritual-director/>

¹⁶ Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Counselling and psychotherapy skills, A practical Guide for Spiritual Direction spiritual direction*, 13.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of the Candidates for Priesthood* (Nairobi: Pauline, 2009), 4.

Born in 1902, Carl Rogers was a humanistic psychologist who was in accordance with the principal ideas of Abraham Maslow; he goes beyond Maslow by adding that for personal growth, a person needs an environment that provides them with genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy.

For Krech, Crutchfield and Livson, Client-centered therapy is based on the belief that people when the opportunity is given, people commit themselves to activities fostering growth. According to Mearns & Throne “the person-centered point of view, however, places high value on the experience of the individual human being and the importance of his subjective reality. It also challenges each person to accept responsibility for his own life and to trust in the inner resources which are available to all those who are prepared to set out along the path of self-awareness and self-acceptance.”¹⁹ The person-centered has different goals; one of them is that it “aims toward the client achieving a greater degree of independence and integration. Its focus is on the person, not on the person’s presenting problem.”²⁰

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Spiritual Accompaniment in the Training of Oblates*

Accompaniment is one of the recommended spiritual exercises in the formation of the candidates in religious life. “Personal accompaniment is an indispensable instrument of formation.”²¹ It is even part of the candidate's formation that can not be removed. “Accompaniment must be present from the beginning of the journey of formation and throughout life, even if it requires different approaches after ordination.”²² In the strict sense it can be defined as “a process initiated by the directee for the explicit purpose of growth and development in the life of faith.”²³ The director is only the facilitator of that process of growth. Spiritual direction is also “help given by one Christian to another which enable the other to pay attention to God’s communication in their life, to growth in the intimacy with God and to live out the consequences of relationship.”²⁴ According to Pope Francis “spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God, in whom we attain true freedom.”²⁵ The directee chooses freely his director. “In religious life, superiors are not excluded from this role, but

¹⁹ Dave Mearns & Brian Thorne, *Person centered counselling in action*, London, Sage Publications, 1993, 5.

²⁰ Gerald Corey, *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*, 169.

²¹ Synod of Bishops xv ordinary general assembly young people, *the faith and vocational discernment*. Instrumentum Laboris Vatican city 2018, 135.

²² Congregation for the clergy, *The gift of the priestly vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 48.

²³ Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Counselling and psychotherapy skills, A practical Guide for Spiritual Direction spiritual direction*, 18.

²⁴ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, New York: Harper One, 2009, 8.

²⁵ Francis (Pope), *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171.

they are not necessarily the best placed to exercise such ministry their fatherhood is exercise first over the whole group, without excluding-it goes without saying- stronger personal relationships. In any case such a relationship must remain perfectly free and spontaneous. It can never be imposed.”²⁶

Accompaniment in formation works best when it is established in a formal way. The time and place for the meeting are settled between the formator and the candidate in a way that is mutually convenient for both. Vocational accompaniment happens at regular intervals, usually according to the need of the candidate and the time constraints of the formator. For the first meeting “the context and cultural procedures of a place will determine the manner of proceeding in self-introduction. A brief introduction which touches a person’s back ground and culture may facilitate the interpersonal and even transcultural encounter.”²⁷ The director may lead or invite the directee to lead a short prayer. Normally, spiritual accompaniment starts and ends with prayer. It is better to ask the directee to lead one of the prayers. Concerning the schedule for spiritual accompaniment session a timetable for meetings has to be proposed; pointing out the specific dates, hours and place.

When one is seeking a more formal Spiritual direction relationship, it is good to find someone who has undergone formation specifically in Spiritual direction; who continues to receive regular supervision; who visits their own spiritual director on a regular basis. It is important to remember that a good Spiritual director offers Spiritual direction as a response to God’s call to this work; this gift has been confirmed by others in the faith community; natural talents and spiritual gifts are enhanced by education and preparation. Typically, one interested in receiving Spiritual direction yearns for a deeper relationship with God. This often involves a desire to grow in the ability to discern and respond to God’s presence and action in all aspects of one’s life. Additionally, a spiritual director can help the directee to cultivate an ongoing spiritual practice suited to the directee’s temperament and life circumstances. Also, ongoing work with a spiritual director can help to develop a sense of inner peace, a sense of direction in life, and discernment in order to fully embrace the wonder of life in God and in God’s creation.

Directees normally meet with their spiritual directors for a one-hour session each month. The session focuses on the directee’s relationship with God in any and in all aspects of the directee’s life. There will be parts of anyone’s life where God’s presence will be more or less clear. Spiritual directors are gifted and skilled at listening with the directee for the Holy moment or Gods seed present in any life

²⁶ Andre Louf, *Grace can do more, spiritual accompaniment and spiritual growth*. Translated by Susan Van Winkle, Cistercian publications. Michigan, Kalamazoo, 2002, 46.

²⁷ Melchior Marandu, *Challenges in spiritual direction, An African perspective*. Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2019, 164.

experience so that the person might consciously receive and cultivate it for a deeper intimacy with the Holy. “The most important thing spiritual directors do, at least in the beginning of any session of spiritual direction, is to listen well to those they direct.”²⁸ Good listening is not solely about keeping quiet while someone else speaks and waiting patiently for your turn to come. Many insights on how to help people to become better listeners have been gained from the way in which counsellors and therapists are trained. Active listening skills, such as paraphrasing, mirroring, reflecting back and summarising, can help speakers to articulate their experiences and their thoughts in a fuller manner. Apart from listening, the directors use also the skill of challenging in order that the directee might examine thoughts or behaviours that seems to be self-defeating, harmful to others or both and own problems and opportunities. Research shows that “the use of skills helps to discern motivation, God’s message, and growth process.”²⁹

Spiritual direction sessions occur in the context of prayer and spiritual intimacy. There is an implicit understanding that in the prayerful engagement between the spiritual director and the directee, God dwells. Conversations between the spiritual director and the directee are considered privileged and are, therefore, kept strictly confidential. The subject matter for spiritual direction is the “spiritual life of the Christian. However, it is good to consider that this assistance is not limited to spiritual issues (practices of piety, moral questions, etc.), as though Christian life were something exclusively spiritual.”³⁰ Hence the breadth and richness of this spiritual help is easy to see. It is a guide to help people sanctify all their temporal activities: their professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities. Rather, spiritual direction concerns a person’s whole life, and all that proceeds from the Holy Spirit, uncreated Gift, and source of the life of grace that is infused in the person.

The spiritual director is obligated to observe absolute secrecy in regard to the confidence he has received from the persons he directs, not only because many of these things are in some way connected with the internal forum, but also because the office of spiritual director obligates him to natural secrecy. The obligation to secrecy is especially important when it is a question of advanced souls who have experienced certain extraordinary phenomena and supernatural charisms. Although a director who comes into contact with such phenomena may have a strong inclination to discuss these things, he should remember that, as a rule, the narration of such things does nothing more than arouse

²⁸ William A. Barry, *Spiritual direction in daily life Review of Ignatian Spirituality* xxxvi, i / 2005 accessed September 2019, <http://www.sjweb.info/documents/cis/pdf/english/200510805en.pdf>

²⁹ Melchior Marandu, *Challenges in spiritual direction, An African perspective*, 168.

³⁰ Jose Maria Escriva, *Conversations* 13, Scepter Publishers (January 1, 2008).

morbid curiosity in others and dispose the director himself to feelings of pride and self-complacency.

➤ *Listening in Spiritual Accompaniment*

In one recent article published in 2017, listening skills are considered as one of the most fundamental skills in counselling. This is for the reason that it is only through listening that a counsellor will be able to discern what a client is going through and that he will be able to help him solve his problem. It will also psychologically help the client to know that he is listened to.

According to Nelson-Jones, listening to counsellors has several important positive consequences. Here is what the author described as follows: First, it helps to establish a relationship between the counsellor and the client. A client is more likely to develop a relationship if he feels he is understood. Listening to a client gives him the perception that his concerns are understood³¹. Second, it helps to reduce the differences. Listening skills in counselling can greatly help counsellors understand someone with different life circumstances³². Third, good listening helps clients experience feelings. Many clients may have been misunderstood in the past. As a result, they may have temporarily given up some of their emotional responsiveness.³³ Good listening can help clients to tune in and recognize the inner flow of their emotions. Fourth, listening skills help to create a base of influence. Active listening is a means by which a counsellor can strengthen his base of influence so that clients are more likely to listen to him.

In addition, understanding with clients from different cultural groups reassures the counsellor that they have status and credibility. Finally, good listening helps clients to fulfil their responsibilities as stated.³⁴ It is for this reason that listening reduces the ability to defend and provides a basis for proposing timely challenges that encourage clients to assume rather than avoid responsibilities.

• *According to this Article these are the Three Important Functions of Listening*³⁵:

- ✓ It promotes trust between the counsellor and the client.
- ✓ It helps client to open up and disclose. He does not perceive disclosure as a risk.
- ✓ On the side of the counsellor, it helps him in collecting information about the client the information can be directly gathered through between the lines statements that a client may make without being aware.

³¹ Richard Nelson-Jones, *Practical Counselling and Helping Skills: Text and Activities for the Lifeskills Counselling Model*, New York: SAGE, 2013, 79-83.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Richard Nelson-Jones, *Introduction to Counselling Skills: Text and Activities*. New York: Sage. (2008), 53.

³⁵ James Taylor, "Listening Skills in Counseling", Essay typing.com, August 26, 2017. Accessed on 16 Nov 2018. <https://www.essaytyping.com/listening-skills-counseling/>

After dividing the skills into three stages Elizabeth Ngozi defined listening as a skill which we all possess in some measure, but for her it is essential for a skill trainer and therapist to develop this skill to a high level. And according to Singh, listening is the process of tuning in carefully to the client's messages and responding accurately to the meaning behind the message.³⁶ It must be said that at the simplest level, the counsellor is invited to comment on the content and feelings that the client has communicated. This is the process of decoding that helps to decode the messages that has been communicated by a client through the tendency of human beings to encode a message rather than communicate clearly and directly what a person thinks and feels.

Singh recommends us to seek to perceive the client position by reading his or her body language, listening to the tonal variation of her voice, looking at her choice of words, and try to sieve the important parts from the jumble. This is conversant with what Singh advised on his book *Counselling Skills for Manager*.³⁷ For him listening can be broken down into several components skills, among them we have first of all the fact of listening to the way things are said in terms of the sound of the voice and the words chosen; being able to look through the conversational style and vocabulary in order to follow the thoughts that lie behind the words. Secondly the fact of listening to the parts and the whole at the same time and learning to highlight the important things in one's own mind as the client speaks; and most importantly reading body language.³⁸

Many authors talk about the barriers faced by the counsellor during the communication with the client. Prendiville in his book raised some barriers to active listening such as a poor environment, lack of privacy, distractions, noise, unpleasant surroundings, judgmental attitude by the counsellor, solution seeking and the counsellor's needs that block³⁹. For Burnard the following elements: the counsellor's preoccupation with other matters, a lack of interest by the counsellor, the counsellors own problems, counsellor's stress and anxiety could be the great barriers⁴⁰. The two authors recognized that it is possible to find any others barriers.

As a basic for good listening Prever suggested three core conditions which are congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy⁴¹. The first one which is congruence is linked to honest relationship between people's

³⁶ Cf. Kavita Singh, *Counselling skills for managers*, PHI Learning Private Limited, 2007, 102.

³⁷ Cf. Ibid, 103.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cf. Patricia Prendiville, *Developing Facilitation Skills: a handbook for group facilitators*, Combat Poverty Agency, 2004.

⁴⁰ Philip Burnard, *Counselling Skills for Health Professionals* 4th ed, Nelson Thornes, (2005), 141-142.

⁴¹ Mark Prever, *Mental Health in Schools: A Guide to Pastoral & Curriculum Provision*, New York: SAGE, (2006), 112.

inner feelings and their outer display that is, being real, authentic, and transparent and not playing a role. The second which is unconditional positive regard: “The counsellor who holds this attitude deeply values the humanity of the client and is not deflected in the valuing by any particular behaviour.”⁴² The third which is empathy refers to viewing the world through the perspective of the client and accepting that clients perceptions and feelings as if they are the counsellors’ without losing boundaries and separate sense of self⁴³. It is required to encourage the client to share freely, that is to say, to encourage the client to speak everything and nothing that is inside his or her chest. This is achieved through the use of probing questions such as: go on..., I am listening..., what do you mean by...? Several good practices were identified. They suggested that during counselling sessions, in order to facilitate listening. A counsellor needs to paraphrase, to request for clarification may be by asking some questions such as what do you mean by? He needs to employ the use of support statements and active feedback.

➤ *The Skill of Empathy in Spiritual Accompaniment*

Carl Rogers affirms: “The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person.”⁴⁴ Decety and Yoder in One recent neuroscience paper entitle Empathy and motivation for justice, defines empathy as “a multifaceted construct used to account for the capacity to share and understand the thoughts and feelings of others.”⁴⁵ The two authors of this article then highlight some aspects of empathy, including what they call emotional empathy and cognitive empathy, an important distinction in academic work involving empathy. For them emotional empathy is “the ability to share or arouse emotion in the emotional states of others, at least in valance and intensity,”⁴⁶ and they describe cognitive empathy in terms of “the ability to consciously put oneself into the mind of another to understand what he is thinking or feeling.”⁴⁷

⁴²Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Psychological counselling for Africa: Handbook of psychotherapy and cultural counselling in African contexts*, 229.

⁴³ Mark Prever, *Mental Health in Schools: A Guide to Pastoral & Curriculum Provision*, 112.

⁴⁴ Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being*, edn., New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1980, 140.

⁴⁵Jean Decety and Keith J. Yoder, Empathy and motivation for justice: Cognitive empathy and concern, but not emotional empathy, predict sensitivity to injustice for others. *Social Neuroscience* 11(1), (2016): 1- 4, accessed 2 February 2019, <https://doi:10.1989/17470919.2015.1029593>.

⁴⁶Joaquín Selva, “Understanding Empathy: What is it and Why is it Important in Counseling” *Positivepsychology*, 23-10-2019. Accessed 25 October 2019. <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/unconditional-positive-regard/>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Empathy can be broken in two parts: feeling the way someone else feels, and understanding how someone else feels. We can say in other words, empathy consist in being able to put yourself in someone else’s position both intellectually and emotionally. The authors noticed that there are many ways to define empathy but we can just keep the fact that empathy is to put yourself in someone else’s position to understand how he is feeling, as well as being sensitive to how someone else is feeling. According to Macfarlane one study found that psychotherapy clients “viewed empathy as integral to the personal and professional relationship they had with their psychotherapist,”⁴⁸ and believed that empathy from their psychotherapist benefited their psychotherapy sessions. Among all the benefits listed by the clients let us highlight these: - A greater levels of trust between the client and therapist; - a greater level of self-understanding for the client, and higher levels of feeling happy and secure.

Moyers and his companions presented another study which was interested in psychotherapist empathy examined the number of empathy therapists demonstrated from client to client, with all clients seeking therapy for problem drinking⁴⁹. Their study proved enough that when therapists demonstrated more empathy than they usually did, the client was less likely to be drinking by the end of treatment, and when therapists demonstrated less empathy than they usually did, the client was more likely to be drinking by the end of treatment. They concluded by saying that treatment outcomes can depend on the level of empathy shown by the therapist, even with the same therapist treating the same issue. On the flip side, some studies have even shown that low levels of therapist empathy may not only fail to reduce problem drinking but can even increase levels of problem drinking in the client.⁵⁰

Empathy can be beneficial for the client as well as for the therapists. Halpern gives this example by saying consider the fact that general care practitioners who empathize with their patients are more likely to have higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout than those who do not sympathize with their patients.⁵¹ Is it possible to show empathy in counselling. As we said from the Macfarlane’s study discussed above that clients benefit

⁴⁸ Peter D. Macfarlane, Timothy M. Anderson, McClintock A.S., Empathy from the client’s perspective: A grounded theory analysis. *Psychotherapy Research* 27(2), (2017): 227-238, accessed 18 July 2019, <https://doi:10.1080/1050307.2015.1090038>.

⁴⁹ Theresa B Moyers., Jon Houck., Samara.L Rice, Longabaugh Richard, Willaim R. Miller Therapist Empathy, Combined Behavioral Intervention, and Alcohol Outcomes in the COMBINE Research Project. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 84(3), (2016): 221-229 accessed 14 June, <https://doi:10.1037/ccp0000074>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jodi Halpern, What is clinical empathy? *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 18(8), (2003): 670-674, accessed 14 June 2019, <https://doi:10.1046/j.1525-1497.2003.21017.x>.

when they feel their therapist is demonstrating empathy. For Jayne and Ray Therapists involved in Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) indicate that some of the ways they convey empathy in-session is by “matching ... facial expression, physical movement, affect vocal tone and inflection, and energy level .”⁵²

Apart from what Jayne and Ray pointed out, Elliott and his companions add the following: not interrupting the client, not dismissing the client’s beliefs, not being judgmental, and not talking too much in general.⁵³ If the therapist does not do any of these things, he may give his client the impression that he respects his client and tries to understand what he thinks, rather than imposing a single treatment plan for his client. While agreeing with the results of Jayne and Ray, it is safe to say that therapists can show that they are empathic to their clients by matching the client’s body language and reflecting their verbal style, while allowing the clients to speak in such a way that they really feel being listened to.

Therapists are called to practice these things, but therapists with a low level of empathy may find it difficult to put these teachings into practice. That is why it is useful to explore the ways in which therapists can raise their own level of empathy so that these empathic behaviours manifest themselves naturally in their sessions. Empathy is to be cultivated as suggested by Leppma and Young. They showed a type of mindfulness meditation called Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) to increase cognitive empathy levels in masters-level counselling students. The two of them said exactly this: “the practice begins with directing loving-kindness, or compassion, toward one’s self. As a sense of respect, friendship, and love or compassion develops with oneself, the practice then expands to include others.”⁵⁴

According to Leppma and Young Just six weeks (six-hour-long, weekly sessions) of practicing this Loving-Kindness Meditation was enough to increase empathy levels, indicating it is an accessible way for all therapists to increase their own levels of empathy. Also a relevant meta-analysis examined several studies that aimed at increasing the level of empathy among medical students.⁵⁵ This

analysis revealed that some successful interventions focused on communication skills and roleplaying. Specifically such a type of intervention focusing on communication skills would have a medical student interact with a stand-in patient in a recorded session. The student would then receive feedback on how they interacted with the patient and given advice on how to demonstrate more empathy⁵⁶. And another one type of intervention focusing on roleplaying would have the medical student act like a patient during a check up so that they could see what it felt like to be on the other side of a physician-patient interaction. Both types of interventions were found to be effective in increasing empathy levels in the medical student.⁵⁷

➤ *Unconditional Positive Regard in Spiritual Accompaniment*

Unconditional Positive Regard is the attitude of complete acceptance and love, whether for yourself or for someone else.⁵⁸ Research shows that “the counsellor who holds this attitude deeply values the humanity of her client and is not deflected in that valuing by any particular client behaviours. The attitude manifests itself in the counsellor’s consistent acceptance of and enduring warmth toward her client.”⁵⁹ By cultivating this attitude, nothing can give a reason to stop seeing the client as inherently human and inherently lovable in whatever he does. This does not mean that you accept each of the actions taken by the person, but that you accept who he is at a much deeper level than the surface behaviour.⁶⁰ Because whatever a human does even though it can affect his dignity, it can not take off his humaneness. In therapy, the idea is much the same, but with a more specific goal of establishing a relationship of positive trust between the therapist and the client. This characteristic of client-centered therapy is very determinative; the client is accepted and supported by the therapist, no matter what he says or does.

Unconditional positive regard does not consist in liking a client or accepting everything he has done; it’s about respecting the client as a human being with his own free will and operating under the assumption that he or she is doing the best he can. Cultivating this attitude toward a client can encourage and push him to share his thoughts, feelings, and

219, accessed 16 June 2019, [https:// doi:10.1186/1472-6920-14-219](https://doi:10.1186/1472-6920-14-219).

⁵⁶ Courtney E. Ackerman, “What is Unconditional Positive Regard in Psychology?” *Positivepsychology*, 10-07-2019. Accessed 10 August 2019. <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/unconditional-positive-regard/>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Psychological counselling for Africa: Handbook of psychotherapy and cultural counselling in African contexts*, 225.

⁶⁰ Courtney E. Ackerman, “What is Unconditional Positive Regard in Psychology?” *Positivepsychology*, 10-07-2019. Accessed 10 August 2019. <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/unconditional-positive-regard/>

⁵²Kimberly M. Jayne, Dee C Ray, Therapist-Provided Conditions in Child-Centered Play Therapy. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling* 54(2), (2015): 86-103, accessed 15 June 2019, [https:// doi:10.1002/johc.12005](https://doi:10.1002/johc.12005).

⁵³ Robert Elliott, Arthur C. Bohart., Jeanne C Watson, Leslie S. Greenberg, Empathy. *Psychotherapy* 48(1), (2011):43-49, accessed, <https://doi:10.1037/a0022187>.

⁵⁴ Monica Leppma, Mark E. Young, Loving-Kindness Meditation and Empathy: A Wellness Group Intervention for Counseling Students. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 94(3), (2016):297-305, accessed 15 June 2019, [https:// doi:10.1002/jcad.12086](https://doi:10.1002/jcad.12086).

⁵⁵ Zak Kelm, James Womer, Jennifer K Walter, Chris Feudtner., Interventions to cultivate physician empathy: a systematic review. *BMC Medical Education* 14(1), (2014):

behaviours more openly with the therapist. But a client who is afraid of the therapist will be shocked, offended, or judgmental will likely not be very forthcoming with any information that he feels may be perceived as negative or unacceptable. It's very obvious that this withholding of important information can have a very negative impact on the therapeutic relationship and, in turn, on any healing that the client is looking to gain from therapy.⁶¹

One continue to discuss that the unconditional positive regard from the therapist may be a substitute for the unconditional positive regard that the client did not get from his or her parents or other adults who have played an important role in his childhood. This leads to understand unconditional positive regard from the theory of the Pygmalion effect and its corollary which is the golem effect. Pygmalion effect "is the phenomenon whereby others' expectations of a target person affect the target person's performance."⁶² And his corollary the golem effect is a phenomenon in which low expectations lead to a decrease in performance. A child who has not had a positive regard from his parents, who was not appreciated by his parents does not have the tendency to esteem him self; and this can cause a lot of blocks within the child. That is why some authors especially Carl Rogers think that those who do not receive such regard from their parents at a young age are more likely to have low self-worth and less likely to reach their full potential with regards to personal development. The unconditional positive regard of a therapist can develop in the client the acceptance and the love he missed in his childhood. This allows the child to feel safe, to open up and to solve his problems; "the greater the degree of caring, prizing, accepting, and valuing of the client in a nonpossessive way, the greater the chance that therapy will be successful."⁶³

Unconditional positive regard contributes to an effective therapeutic experience. Carl Rogers explained it from what it saw as innate human needs and instincts. For him, we all have two instinctual urges and desires that make unconditional positive regard an effective tool of therapy: - The drive towards socially constructive behaviour, or interacting effectively and positively with others; - The need for self-determination, or the right and responsibility to choose one's own path. When a therapist takes into account the client's need for self-determination and adopts the attitude that the client does his best with the tools and resources they have available, the client is more likely to allow their urge towards socially constructive behaviour to drive their decisions and their actions. Let us give an example of unconditional positive regard: One of the best representations of unconditional positive regard in therapy sessions is a scenario in which the client shares thoughts,

feelings, or behaviours with the therapist that are considered morally wrong or simply unacceptable. In this case, the therapist can display unconditional acceptance by asking the client about their feelings and what they believe drove the thought or behaviour rather than focusing on how the client's actions would hurt someone else or on the illegality or immorality of the action.⁶⁴

Finally, one can see an unconditional positive regard in modeling the client's acceptance by the therapist. The therapist who unconditionally accepts (without judging) will show the client that he is always accepted and valued, even when he makes mistakes, that is to say that he remains human despite his mistakes and that he can always improve; this is a stimulus for the client. So the therapist's positive regard serves as a model for the client's acceptance, giving him the message that if the therapist can accept him, whatever he does, he can also accept himself as he is.

According to Carl Rogers, UPR is about creating an environment for clients that most allows for their healthy. An environment of unconditional positive regard benefits the client in the following ways: -When the therapist offers no judgement the client feels less fearful and can share their thoughts, feelings, and actions freely; -As the therapist accepts the client, the client is encouraged to find self-acceptance; -The therapist allows the client space to think for themselves over using questions designed to certain illicit answers; -By allowing the client such space the client can begin to cultivate their inner resources; -By seeing the client through their behaviours, the therapist offers the client a chance to realise they are more than just their behaviours.

➤ *Other Counselling Skills and Techniques*

There are many different Techniques that counsellors can use with their clients. Here is a look at some of the Techniques that are felt to be most effective during a counselling session:

- *Confrontation:*

Leaman defines confrontation as "an open, honest identification of the client's self-defeating patterns or manipulations."⁶⁵ The confrontation is within the client. He should be able to do a self-examination of himself during counselling session.

- *Encouraging:*

It is a technique that facilitates confidence and respect between the client and the counsellor. Through this technique the counsellor focuses on the client's strengths in order to help them so that they may see themselves in a positive way. It helps the clients to make a progress.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Mitchell Terence R., Daniels Denise. "Motivation". In Walter C. Borman, Daniel R. Ilgen, Richard J. Klimoski, *Handbook of Psychology* (volume 12). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2003), 229.

⁶³Gerald Corey, *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*, 175.

⁶⁴ Courtney E. Ackerman, "What is Unconditional Positive Regard in Psychology?" *Positivepsychology*, 10-07-2019. Accessed 10 August 2019. <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/unconditional-positive-regard/>

⁶⁵ David R. Leaman, *Confrontation in Counseling. Personnel & Guidance Journal*; Jun78, 56(10), (1978), 630-633.

- *Attending*

This skill was understood by Bolton as giving all your physical attention to another person. This can be demonstrated by appropriate use of eye contact and many others gestures:

To facilitate good communication the language can be used as a tool depending on how each part of body is moving by capturing the attention and maintaining the interpersonal relationship.

The posture of involvement: to establish a posture of involvement Bolton suggests: - Lean towards the speaker. It will communicate energy and attention and even the involvement; -Keeping an open posture in order to foster interpersonal relationship. All these led Gerard to develop and promote the following acronym SOLER. This acronym (SOLER) means⁶⁶:

- ✓ Squarely face the client
- ✓ Open posture
- ✓ Lean towards the client:
- ✓ Eye contact:
- ✓ Relaxed and natural behaviour

- *Open-ended Questions:*

Open-ended questions enable people in a counselling to bring more details on the discussion. Therefore, the open-ended question has three roles to enable the clients to respond to the following questions: how, why, and what. During counselling, this type of question is asked with the purpose of clarifying and understanding. If questions are used, they should be open and not closed questions. An example of a closed question is “Are you feeling cold today?” or true or false; Open question: “How are you feeling now?” This question gives to the client the opportunity of speaking more about the issues.

- *Paraphrasing:*

It reveals to clients all the attention of counsellor in listening so that the counsellor may avoid any kind of mistake in his way of getting or understanding the message during the counselling session. Paraphrasing is a way of putting in different words what the other person said and checking you have got it in a right way. “Paraphrasing is not a matter of simply repeating or parroting what the client has stated. Rather it is capturing the essence of what the client is saying, through rephrasing. When the counsellor has captured what the client is saying, often the client will say, that’s right or offer some other form of confirmation.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Gerard Egan, *The skilled helper a problem-management and opportunity-development approach to helping ninth edition*, USA, Brooks/ Cole, Cengage Learning, 2010, pdf

⁶⁷ Sandra Poletto (n.d.) AIPC’s *Counsellor Skills Series. Verbal & Non-Verbal Communication Skills*. 2009, <http://www.counsellingconnection.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/report-1-verbal-and-non-verbal-communication-skills.pdf>.

- *Reflection of Feeling:*

Counsellors use this technique to show their clients that they are fully aware of the feelings that their client is experiencing.

Example: Client Thomas (clenching her fists): “I don’t know why my mother chose to live so far away from me when he knew how sick she was going to become.”

Counsellor Elizabeth: “You seem angry with your mother for moving so far away.”

Client Patrick: “I am. I now have to travel halfway across the country to see her. She is so selfish.” In the above interaction, you can see how reflecting and paraphrasing work together.

- *Self-Disclosure:*

Self-disclosure is defined as “a conscious, intentional technique in which clinicians share information about their lives outside the counselling relationship.”⁶⁸ We can say it is a kind of a “pertinent revelation by the therapist of his or her personal details to the client”⁶⁹ It often increase trust on the side of the client. “The role of this process is to “facilitate client disclosure through modeling and the establishment of trust.”⁷⁰

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Kothari: “the research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data.”⁷¹ This study focused on counselling skills as a tool for accompaniment of the oblate candidates in formation. The study adopted mixed method research design; specifically, the convergent parallel design was used to collect, analyse and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The decision to use a mixed methodology for data collection and analysis is inspired by the humanistic nature of the topic and research problem. “Often the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is framed in terms of using words qualitative rather than numbers quantitative.”⁷² It is important to note that the qualitative information is obtain

⁶⁸Dawn H Simone, Patricia McCarthy, Carol L. Skay, An investigation of client and counselor variables that influence likelihood of counselor self-disclosure. *Journal of Counseling and Development*. 76. (1998): 174-182.

⁶⁹ *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, edited by Gary R. VandenBos, American Psychological Association Washington, DC, 2007.

⁷⁰ Jourard Sidney.M, *Disclosing Man to Himself*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, (1968).

⁷¹ C. R. Kathori, *Research Methodology: Method and Technique*. 2nd Edition, (New Delhi: A New age International, 2004), 31.

⁷²John W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. California, SAGE Publications, 2009, 3.

through the open ended question in the research instrument because the researcher could not carry out interview or focus group discussion.

➤ *Sampling Procedure*

According to Mvumbi and Ngumbi Sampling allows the researcher to avoid subjecting the entire population under attention to investigation. The Province of Congo was chosen by the researcher because he belongs to this Province, knows it very well and has a bit of experience as a formator in this Province. The study adopted a stratified sampling technique to stratify the target population into five strata as follows according to the stages in formation: Pre-novices, Novices, oblate scholastics in philosophy, oblate scholastics in theology and formators. Mugenda and Mugenda state that this technique allows the researcher to attain the preferred representation from different subcategories in the population.

The researcher employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. A probability sampling procedure, called also random or chance selection is useful because every component chosen has an equal chance of participating in the research. On the other hand non-probability sampling uses whatever participants are available rather than following a specific selection process. Therefore, the researcher employed a simple random sampling technique in the proposed study to offer each participant a chance of participating in the study and attain objectivity in the sampling of the targeted population.

The remainder of the sample (82 participants) was divided proportionally between the pre-novices, novices, oblate scholastics in philosophy, oblate scholastics in theology and formators. The sample frame is presented below:

Table 1 Sample Frame

Participants	Population	Sample	%	Sampling Technique
Formators	18	15	22	Purposive
Oblate scholastics in philosophy	15	12	18	Purposive
Oblate scholastics in theology	30	24	37	Purposive
Novices	7	6	8	Purposive
Pre-novices	12	10	15	Purposive
Total	82	67	100%	

➤ *Description of Research Instruments*

According to Mvumbi and Ngumbi, in collecting data, it is essential for the researcher to establish the most appropriate means of eliciting data from the participants. This study used structured questionnaire designed by the researcher containing both open-ended and closed questions to increase the legitimacy of the findings. The questionnaires was sent through the email of the secretary provincial office that distributed the same questionnaires to formators and candidates and then the same office sent them back to the researcher. The questionnaires consisted of 22 statements divide into 5 sections. For the close ended questions (quantitative data) the responses was measured on a five likert scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Not Sure, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree); and from the open ended questions (qualitative data) have been withdrawn all the themes that were develop but only the major themes were analysed.

studies by evaluating and cross checking the questionnaire with experts in the field before using it for data collection.

The test-retest technique will be used to check the reliability of the research instrument in this research. According to Kumar, this technique involves administering the instrument once and then a second time under the same or similar settings. For the reliability is then established by the correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores.

➤ *Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments*

Kumar terms validity as, “the ability of an instrument to measure what it is designed to measure.”⁷³ Elsewhere, he explains that a research tool is considered reliable if it produces consistent results each time it is administered under the same or similar conditions. Selvam asserts that confidence that a given finding shows what it purports to show. That is, it is close to reality. The researcher asked question without using difficult words for respondents to understand. The researcher determined the strength of the

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

For Mugenda and Mugenda, the research must be carried out by people of integrity; sincerely concerned about the quality of life of their participants and not for personal merit. They also point out that researchers must abide by respective laws that prohibit unethical conduct. In this study therefore, the researcher will seek to expand knowledge in an honest and sincere manner.

Prior to administering questionnaires and conducting interviews, the researcher will obtain the informed consent of the participants. According to Wiles the informed consent encompasses: giving clear information to the participants as to what the research will involve as well as offering them the prospect of deciding whether to or not to take part. Thus the researcher will allow the respondents the freedom to respond or not to respond to any questions in the instruments. The participants will also be informed that their participation is voluntary at all times.

The participants were assured of confidentiality. This implies that ‘-identifiable information about individuals collected during the process of research will not be disclosed

⁷³ Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-by- Step guide for beginners*. 3rd Edition, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014) 213

and that the identity of the research participants will be protected.⁷⁴ Thus, the researcher will seek to establish a rapport with the participants so as to allow them to open up in sharing their thoughts and opinions. The respondents were guaranteed that any information obtained was used only for academic purposes. Thus they were requested not to reveal their identity on the research instruments.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda throughout the data collection, the researcher will strive to abide by relevant steps such as ensuring that data collection is accurate. The researcher will inform the respondents of the time for interviewing and filling out the questionnaires to avoid inconveniences. Information gathered will be kept carefully for analysis and interpretation.

IV. DISCUSSION

➤ *Year of Experience in Formation*

The formators background information on their years in formation and their age have been collected and analyzed as follows:

The result has shown 22% or 4/18 are 0-2 years; 33% or 6/18 are 3-5years; 28% or 5/18 are 6-9 years; 17% or 3/18 are 10 years and above. Formators with great experience are minority, it means that a big number of them are young and untrained on counselling skills, they have not received any kind of training in order to serve as formator. This corresponds to what Elizabeth Ngozi said “many priests and religious who give spiritual direction are not trained to offer the service properly.”⁷⁵

The candidate’s demographic information on their years in formation and their age have been collected and analysed as follows: all the 12 pre-novices (100%) are 0-2 years in formation ; 86% of novices or 6/7 are 0-2 years and 14% or 1/7 are 3-5years ; 87% or 13/15 of philosophers are 3-5years and 13% or 2/15 are 6-9 years; 67% or 20/30 of theologians are 6-9 years and 33% or 10/30 are 10 years and above. As it is shown from the statistics pre-novices and novices are 0-2 years in formation. This means they do not have enough experience concerning accompaniment, some of them probably do not have the right information on accompaniment, all they want during accompaniment is to be listened to and to be advised by the formators. Accompaniment is a new reality for them, they have to learn it. Formators need to show them the importance of accompaniment and encourage them to attend it.

Philosophers and theologians have some experience of accompaniment, some completed 5 years of accompaniment and others have completed 9 years of accompaniment, and they can speak of accompaniment and give a point of view

⁷⁴ Rose Wiles, *What are qualitative Research Ethics*(London: Australasian Human Research Ethics Consultancy Services Pty Ltd (AHRECS, 2013) 42

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Counselling and psychotherapy skills, A practical Guide for Spiritual Direction spiritual direction*, 13.

concerning how it has to be carried out because they have a subject in their training to priesthood that addresses the issue of accompaniment. They are people who understand that some issues, without neglecting the importance of prayer, may request proper skills to be handled.

➤ *Age of the Formators*

Regarding age the collected data has shown that 2/18 among formators or (11%) are 29-34 years; 5/18 or (28%) are 35-39 years; 6/18 or (33%) are 40-44 years; 5/18 or (28%) are 45 years and above. This result can be interpreted as follows, in the province of Congo those who are appointed formators are priest with a certain pastoral experience, most of them belong to the age bracket between 35-44 years, and it means that they completed 5 years after being ordained. 11% may represent priests newly ordained who are appointed as formator due to the lack of formators and 28% or 45years and above are priests to whom the provincial appeals when there is an emergency or a crisis that requests him to appoint a formator.

➤ *Age of the Candidates*

Regarding the age, the data collected have shown that pre-novices 2/12 are 18-20 years (17%) ; 10/12 are 21-25 years (83%); and 57% or 4/7 of novices are 21-25 years ; 29% or 2/7 are 26-30 years; 14% or 1/7 is 18-20; and 10/15 philosophers are 21-25 years (67%) ; 5/15 philosophers are 26-30 years (23%); and 2/30 or 7% of theologians are 21-25 years ; 20/30 or 67% of theologians are 26-30 years ; 8/30 or 26% of theologians are 31 and above. Many candidates are young and somehow innocent when they join the congregation, some of them did not have professional experience, after finishing high school they have been recruited and they are much influenced by their environment and family. Table 4.3 shows that 26% of theologians are 31years and above. This represents those who are delayed in different stages in theology like perpetual vows, diaconate and priesthood for many reasons including accompaniment.

➤ *Spiritual Accompaniment and the Training of Oblates*

It has been observed that in all the groups almost all agreed that accompaniment without counselling skills is limited only 14% of philosophers, 14% of novices and 33% of pre-novices were neutral. That is to say the lack of this tool which is counselling skills can really have a serious impact in the formation of the candidate. “The emphasis in formation is on the growth and development of the whole person which presupposes an integration of his intellectual, emotional, sexual, behavioural and spiritual capacities”⁷⁶ in this context accompaniment has to do mainly with facilitating the internalisation of Christian values rooted in all levels of human functioning”.⁷⁷ For this it must integrate counselling skills.

⁷⁶ Dolphin Brenda, *The Gift of Accompaniment in Formation*, accessed on 17th February from <http://isa.augustinians.net/attachments/article/84/the%20Gift%20of%20accompaniment%20in%20formation.pdf>

⁷⁷ Rulla, L., *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, Volume 1, Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1986, 388, 389.

The record of data as collected showed that novices and pre-novices agreed totally in 100% that formators should apply counselling skills in order to assist the candidates to make a right decision in their spiritual journey. A large number of formators, philosophers and theologians share the same mind but figure 4.3 is presenting 14% of philosophers and 20% theologians that are neutral on this question, and also the same figure presents 20% of philosophers and 16% of theologians that disagreed that formators should apply counselling skills in order to assist the candidates.

Concerning how untrained formator handle the issues in accompaniment session, different opinions came out: 33% of pre-novices, 14% of novices, 20% of philosophers, 13% of theologians and 50% of formators agreed strongly that untrained formators focus more on prayer and scriptures as noted by Elizabeth Ngozi.⁷⁸ And on the other hand 14% of novices, 53% of philosophers and 37% of theologians agreed on that and carried the same mind. But this question on how to handle issue in accompaniment was really a topic of discussion in which 67% of pre-novices, 43% of novices, 20% of theologians and 28% of formators were neutral. They postulated that some untrained formators used the skills without knowing them. In the different groups responding to the questionnaire 29% of novices, 27% of philosophers 17% of theologians and 22% of formators disagreed by postulating that untrained formators use the skills and their own experience while among the novices 13% disagreed strongly.

Concerning the duration of spiritual accompaniment, different opinions were pointed out: 33% of pre-novices, 29% of novices, 20% of philosophers, 27% of theologians and 78% of formators agreed strongly that spiritual accompaniment should last from 45minutes to 1 hour. And on the other hand 67% of pre-novices, 29% of novices, 53% of philosophers and 50% of theologians agreed on that. On the question about the duration of spiritual accompaniment 29% of novices, 13% of philosophers and 17% of theologians were neutral and postulated that it is not necessary that accompaniment should last 1hour. In the different groups responding to the questionnaire 13% of novices, 13% of philosophers 6% of theologians disagreed on that duration of the spiritual accompaniment. "It is the duty of the counsellor to speak about the time limit in which case the client herself will adjust her interview so that she is able to come to a conclusion on time."⁷⁹

Globally many skills have been brought out by the respondents such as listening, probing, affirming and mirroring, attentive listening, welcoming, questioning, paraphrasing, summarising and empathy. The observation is that most of the formators know or apply mainly the skills of listening, questioning, paraphrasing and summarising. They

ignore many others skills or they applied them without knowing that they are skills. Some formators have made the difference between listening, attentive listening and many other kinds of listening. "Counselling psychologists have analysed the various levels of listening in terms of its appropriateness in a counselling context namely fake listening, partial listening, projective listening, filtered listening and total listening."⁸⁰ Listening is the most applied among the skills because without this skill accompaniment can not be held but there are different levels of listening that can lead one to distinguish the normal one and the attentive one.

Some respondents for their own part mentioned that formators use open ended questions. Open questions usually elicit fuller and more meaningful responses by encouraging the candidate to talk at greater length. But close ended questions most of the time block the accompaniment because they just require answers like "Yes" or "Not". Quite number of respondents mentioned also skills like self disclosure and empathy.

From all the categories the conclusion is that fomators use counselling skills mainly: listening, questioning both open ended and close ended questions, and paraphrasing, summarising and empathy. It is obvious that formators welcome candidates when they come for accompaniment but they do not know that the way of welcoming is a skill.

The groups underlined the advantages of having trained formators. The main themes coming from the respondents are three: the first theme is that of self awareness. Trained formators lead the candidate to self awareness. The second theme is that of addressing or dealing with emotional issues. This seems to be a challenge for many formators and the third theme is that of understanding the unconscious and conscious motivations of the candidates. This third point can really be taken into account by the province of Congo which is seen by the General administration of the Oblates as an intellectualist Province. It means that the Province of Congo focuses too much on the intellectual aspect and tries to neglect other aspects. For Cecini "motivation refers to series of common expressions: intention, desire, end, interest, motive, choice, preference. They all show that behaviour follows a direction that was impressed on a person before it was manifested. Motivation is what is capable of moving the subject."⁸¹

Apart from the themes previously mentioned, some respondents raised the topic of using modern methods like enneagram, Myers Briggs etc. They are modern methods that might assist the formators for the assessment of candidates. In the province of Congo psychological life and human maturity is an important component of the

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Ngozi Okpalaenwe, *Counselling and psychotherapy skills, A practical Guide for Spiritual Direction spiritual direction*, 13.

⁷⁹ Allan Pease, *Body Language*. New Delhi: Sudha Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1990, 15-16

⁸⁰ D. John Antony, OFM, Cap. *Skills of counselling microskill model Kinesics and Focusing are included*, 2003, Anugraha Publications Anugraha, 110-112.

⁸¹ Amedeo Cencini and Alessandro Manenti, *Psychology and formation. Structures and dynamics*, Bombay, India, 2010, 410

assessment (Report). Trained formators lead the candidates to self awareness and moreover they are also aware of their own limits and they know how to apply the skills and are capable to adapt themselves to the level of the candidates. They know how the personality of the candidate appears in his different activities for example when he plays football or volley-ball and when he is speaking.

➤ *Skill of Listening in Accompaniment and Formation of Oblate Candidates*

Regarding listening in spiritual accompaniment it was observed that 33% of pre-novices, 14% of novices and 10% of theologians agreed strongly that some formators do not listen attentively to the candidates. In the same line 33% of pre-novices, 29% of novices, 47% of philosophers, 27% of theologians and 28% of formators agreed also on that but a large number of the respondents has been neutral, among them are mentioned 33% of pre-novices, 14% novices, 26% of philosophers, 30% of theologians and 50% of formators. May be it is because they estimate that listening is the first or one of the core skills without which accompaniment is not held. "Formators should also develop the art of listening for the best accompaniment of the candidate in formation."⁸² In all the categories except that of pre-novices are represented a portion of those who disagreed as follows 14% of novices 27% of philosophers 20% of theologians and 22% of formators. There are also portion of those who strongly disagreed. They are 29% of novices and 13% of theologians. Those who disagreed are affirming that listening is one of the basic skills and one of the most known that formators apply most.

To show the candidates that they are listened to, formators apply the skills of paraphrasing, questioning and summarising. 14% of novices, 33% theologians and 28% agreed strongly on that while majority of the respondents of different groups meaning 33% of pre-novices, 29% of novices, 67% of philosophers, 40% of theologians and 72% of formators agreed also on that but 33% of pre-novices, 43% of novices, 13% of philosophers and 17% are neutral. Those who disagreed are 33% of pre-novices, 14% of novices, 20% of philosophers and 10% of theologians. This means that some candidates have seen formators applying couple of skills during accompaniment like mirroring, reflecting back etc.

• *Four Major Themes have been used throughout the Responses given by Different Groups of Respondents.*

Tiredness: it blocks the formators to listen carefully to the candidates due to excessive business. Some formators are engaged to the parish to the university as lecturer; they can be running up and down the whole day and come back home late and tired. In this category can be mentioned the fact of feeling unwell (physical health): sickness might also prevent the formators from listening carefully to the candidates and therefore it can affect the spiritual

dispositions (state of mind). Family issues and personal problems can disturb the mind of the formators and for this reason it is advisable that formator must be taken care of.

Inappropriate environment: by this the respondents meant the set up of the environment. Some of the respondents noticed that spiritual direction can take place in the TV room, in the bed room of the formators, while walking or moving around the compound etc.

Lack of openness from the candidate: it refers to the fact the candidate might willingly avoid sharing his life by fear that he may be dismissed from the vocational journey. In this case the candidates consider the formators as a police who is going to use his informations against him; he will not bring the real topic for accompaniment.

Distraction, by distraction the respondents meant all the means of communication especially the use of cell phone during spiritual accompaniment, the record of what the candidate is saying, some formators can be recording through typing in their lap top what the candidates are saying. Moreover they mentioned also misunderstanding as one of the factors that blocks the formators to listen to the candidates.

Preconceived ideas: the formator will not mind to listen to the candidate properly because he thinks that he knows what the candidate is going to share with him in advance.

From all the responses, the following themes have been developed: empathic dispositions, attentive listening, and avoiding distraction: TV or radio, good environment, the use of questions both open and closed ended and the use of the skill of paraphrasing and summarising. Showing empathy is a sign that formator is listening to the candidate. Attentive listening is most of the time expressed by summarising, paraphrasing and questioning because the formator can not summarise, paraphrase and question without first listening to the candidate attentively. This opinion is also shared by many other respondents. In addition the clarification of misinformation through the repletion or reformulation of words is also a proof of an attentive listening.

The formator is required to avoid things that might distract him during the time of accompaniment for example the manipulation of the cell phone, doing accompaniment when the TV is on. Moreover he should choose a good environment. Accompaniment should not take place everywhere it needs a specific room, well set for that purpose.

➤ *Skill of Empathy in Accompaniment and Formation of Oblate Candidates*

To the question of knowing if some formators do not allow candidates to express their feeling during accompaniment the collected data have shown that all the groups agreed in their major part that formators do not allow candidates to express their feeling during accompaniment. The research represents them as follows 67% of pre-novices,

⁸² Kevin P McClone , Intimacy and healthy affective maturity. Guidelines for formation. Human Development. 2009, Vol. 30, N. 04, 5-13.

14% of novices, 47% of philosophers, 27% of theologians and 50% of formators. Only two groups agreed strongly, that of novices with 29% and that of theologians with 13%. Those who have been neutral are 33% of pre-novices, 14% of novices, 13% of philosophers, 27% of theologians and 50% of formators. On this question some of the members of different groups disagreed. They are 14% of novices; 33% of philosophers and 23% of theologians. It means that for those supporting this last opinion, some formators do not prevent the candidates from expressing their feelings and emotions. Most of the time formators face many challenges while dealing with emotional issues and handling pain. Many candidates feel relieved after expressing their feelings. This goes together with the culture of the people. Some consider the fact of expressing feelings and emotions as a weakness or the sign of lack of self-control.

The more the formator is showing empathy the more the candidate can grow spiritually. From the collected data it has been indicated that globally in each group the members strongly agreed in large number as follow: 67% of pre-novices, 29% of novices, 13% of philosophers, 33% of theologians 22% formators. In each group mentioned above a remarkable number of others respondents shared the same idea and simply agreed that empathy foster spiritual growth. They are 43% of novices, 53% of philosophers, 40% of theologians and 50% formators. This means that they understand that “empathy helps clients (1) pay attention and value their experiencing; (2) see earlier experiences in new ways; (3) modify their perceptions of themselves, others, and the world; and (4) increase their confidence in making choices and in pursuing a course of action.”⁸³ In each group, the result shows an important number of those who are neutral. They are represented this way: 33% of pre-novices, 14% of novices, 20% of philosophers 17% of theologians and 28% of formators. Only two groups with a small number disagreed that the more the formator shows empathy the more the candidate can grow spiritually.

In responding to the question three topics were brought out: avoiding dramatization, expressing the candidate's feelings and disclosure. Dramatization means to give to the candidate the impression that what he did can not be handled, that is to make him hopeless. Some formators lead candidates to condemn themselves and not to accept the situation that they are facing.

Expressing the candidate's feelings is important inasmuch as it puts the candidate in to the posture to believe that he is not suffering alone in his difficult situation, there is somebody who can assist him to find a solution because he is feeling also like him, that is the reason why proximity to the candidate during crisis moment is very important. Insisting on empathy quite number of respondents postulated that empathy can come in a very spontaneous way due to the circumstances; it can be shown through facial expression. The formator can not be smiling while the

candidate is under the shock of losing his mother or an important person to him.

Some of the respondents put the focus on disclosure in case the formator has had a similar experience shared by the candidate. Disclosure will motivate the candidate to share more because he will understand that some people went through the same experience like him. One of the ways to show empathy is not to underestimate the candidate because the fact of not underestimating the candidate will not foster the empathic dispositions and will not lead the formator to encourage the candidate. The formator will not assist the candidate in finding solution.

Showing empathy can have so many effects on the candidates. The main ones that have been raised up by different groups of respondents are:

The candidate will develop a sense of understanding and manage his emotions and feelings; he will be willing to share more about his issues. This will create a kind of disclosure and moreover a self-esteem, a blossoming and confidence in accompaniment. He will feel relieved and consoled; some can even build positive values from empathy that was shown to them.

The fact of not showing empathy during accompaniment has many effects on the candidates. The different effects brought out by all the groups are the following: No sense of belonging, tendency of closing in, hypocrisy in formation, rigidity (phobia or fear of formators), lack of openness, lack of blossoming, unavailability for accompaniment, the candidate will start lacking the taste for accompaniment. The candidate will get frustrated and consequently lose his self-esteem and get discouraged. In addition it has been noted that the fact of not showing empathy would block to formation and to accompaniment.

➤ *Unconditional Positive Regard in Accompaniment and Oblate Formation*

In all the groups, members agreed massively that formators are judgmental in accompaniment session. Among those groups it is indicated that 33% are pre-novices, 57% are novices, 33% are philosophers, 33% are theologians and 72% are formators. Except the group of the formators, others groups strongly agreed that formators are judgmental. Those who agreed strongly are 67% of pre-novices, 14% of novices, 20% of philosophers and 7% of theologians. Among the respondents of each group some are neutral on this question about judgmental attitude in spiritual accompaniment; a large group is that of formators with 28% followed by that of theologians with 27%, followed by that of novices with 14% and finally followed by that of philosophers with 13%. On this question, only theologians disagreed strongly that formators are judgmental, those theologians represent a minority of 13%, while novices, philosophers and some others theologians disagreed also on the judgmental attitude. They are respectively 14%, 34% and 20%.

⁸³ Gerald Corey, *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*, 175.

Some formators have a pessimistic view on candidates. All the groups except that of pre-novices have agreed that some formators are pessimistic. Figure 4.16 has reported it as follows: 50% of formators, 33% of theologians, 40% philosophers and 57% of novices. Pre-novices have strongly agreed in great number that is 67% of them, followed by philosophers who strongly agree in a less remarkable number that is 17% and theologians as well with a low number that is 7%. But in each group, the figure represents those who are neutral, starting with 33% of pre-novices, 29% of novices, 20% of philosophers, 27% of theologians and 50% of formator. All the candidates a part from pre-novices disagreed on this questions. They are 14% of novices, 23% of philosophers and 33% of theologians.

The responses can be divided into two categories. The first category has noted three main ways of showing the respect for the dignity and the person of the candidates. It can be shown through absolute discretion in formation house, the respect for the candidates' freedom, that is to say avoiding imposing things by force. Some formators or spiritual directors think that spiritual accompaniment is all about imposing or giving some directives that the candidate should implement at all cost. The respect for the dignity of the candidate may also be shown through avoiding the judgemental in formation.

For the second category the ways of showing the respect for the dignity and the person of the candidate are the following: avoiding using means of communication during accompaniment (for example manipulating cell phone when the candidate is sharing his issues) and having a charitable way of cautioning. The respect of the candidate's dignity is shown first of all through the way of welcoming the candidate (skill of welcoming), and also when the formator does not turn spiritual accompaniment into monologue. The formator should use a fraternal language; he should avoid choking words in accompaniment and mockeries and should respect himself.

From all the responses of the first group of respondents, the result of the lack of respect for the dignity and the person of the candidate are three: distrust and disclosure, doing accompaniment by formality and rudeness of candidate or rebellion, that is to say the candidate might break with accompaniment or decide to end up his vocational journey and leave the program.

In second group of respondents, some noticed that the candidates may change the spiritual director or lose the taste for accompaniment. Others showed that the candidates might become violent and aggressive and can develop resistance. "Practically we can divide the [candidates] into those who do not want to cooperate and those who though willing cannot cooperate with the counsellor. They are the reluctant clients and resistant clients. Reluctant clients are those persons who do not want counselling at all for their

own personal reason. They are not self-referred but rather referred to by others."⁸⁴

Quite number of respondents postulated that the candidate might start avoiding the formator he will develop phobia: fear for taking initiatives and this can silence the candidate. "Phobias are characterized by intense irrational fear with anxiety as it central component. Here the anxiety is displaced to a specific object or situation, unlike the free-floating type in the anxiety state. People could cultivate phobic reactions to any object or any situation: like open places, high places, closed places, darkness, crowd, fire, blood and animals."⁸⁵

➤ *Other Skills and Strategies for Accompaniment of Oblate Candidates*

In order to improve the effectiveness of accompaniment many suggestions have been made from all the groups. From the group of formators these are the main suggestions:

- Formation of future formators: Preparing formators from the beginning of formation
- Counselling for all the candidates in order to create self awareness
- Explaining the role of counselling to the candidates
- Organizing seminar on counselling skills
- Counting on the assistance of the Holy Spirit who is the director per excellence
- From the group the candidates, these are the main suggestions:
- Formation (training) of formator, workshop on counselling skills, training spiritual directors: handling emotional issues, valuing the place of accompaniment, importance of counselling and accompaniment.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *Based on the Findings and Conclusions Presented on the Study, the Research Proposed the following Recommendations:*

- To the leaders of the congregations: they need to be aware that formation is an art that demands too much. They should train formators before assigning them to formation house. Moreover they should start preparing the candidates that show the abilities to be a formator from the beginning of their studies of theology after a proper consultation.
- They need to organise each year a workshop or seminar for at least 2 weeks on counselling skills and accompaniment, this workshop should be opened to those who are chosen by the provincial to render to service in near future so that congregations may not lack formators in unexpected situations.

⁸⁴ D. John Antony, OFM, Cap. *Skills of counselling microskill model Kinesics and Focusing are included*, 110-112

⁸⁵ Ibid.

- Provincials and formators need to call various specialists to provide assistance, for example in the field of psychology, this contribution is valuable both for the formators and for the candidates principally in two areas: in the assessment of personality, expressing an opinion as to the psychological health of the candidate; and in therapeutic accompaniment, in order to shed light on any problems that may emerge and to assist in growth in human maturity.
- Formators: they should recommend the candidates to attend counselling but it will be helpful to explain the role of counselling to the candidates. Candidates should be taught accompaniment because sometimes they do not know what to share with the spiritual director in accompaniment.
- Spiritual directors: to explain or make clear their work in order to facilitate the openness of the candidates and help them in finding solution. The directors may integrate into accompaniment the counselling skills in order to improve the service they offer to the candidates.
- To candidates: to get rid of the mentality that the psychologist's work is to read his mind or to think that the director is a police looking for informations to be incorporated in the report. They have to trust their formators or directors.

VI. CONCLUSION

Accompaniment is part of holistic formation that requires all the attention of those in charge of formation, therefore it is important to integrate counselling skills into accompaniment through the use of person centered of Carls Rogers in order to improve the practice of accompaniment and assist the candidates to become a full functioning person. Listening, empathy and unconditional positive regard are the main skills that are needed by the formators because without listening accompaniment can not be held; empathy creates willingness to share, disclosure from the candidate, self-esteem, blossoming, confidence and relief in accompaniment; and unconditional positive regard is the full respect for the dignity and person of the candidate that can be shown through discretion, respect for the candidates' freedom, fraternal language and the fact of avoiding mockeries. Person-centered therapy has been shown to be as viable as the more goal-oriented therapies. Candidates feel empowered from person-centred therapy as the responsibility is on them to make decisions.

Formators should be trained on psychology and precisely on counselling skills as recommended by the guidelines for the use of psychology in the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood "every formator should have a good knowledge of the human person: his rhythms of growth; his potentials and weaknesses; and his way of living his relationship with God."⁸⁶ The decree *Optatam totius* in the same line states that the educators of the seminary must be carefully prepared in sound doctrine,

⁸⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of the Candidates for Priesthood*, Op. Cit, 14.

suitable pastoral experience and special spiritual and pedagogical training. Though the training on counselling skills, the spiritual director need to have in mind that he is the instrument God wants to use to help each one comes to know his Will, it means the spiritual director should not take the place of the Holy Spirit.

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