
Effectiveness of Guidance and Counseling Services in Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Case Study of Githunguri Sub-County in Kiambu County

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Abstract

The emotional and psychological status of many learners in the 21st century has been vastly affected by various aspects including substance abuse, domestic poverty, teenage issues, physical disabilities, domestic violence and early pregnancy among others such factors. The consequences of this distress are dire and far-reaching. Various strategies have been enacted by the education sector in an attempt to address issues that affect students. On top of these strategies featured the strengthening guidance and counseling services in schools. Despite these efforts, indiscipline in schools is still on the increase. This thus casts a shadow of doubt on the effectiveness of the guidance and counselling services in Kenyan schools. This study thus sought to effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in secondary schools in Kenya. This study was conducted in Githunguri sub-county, Kiambu County. The sub-county had a total of 30 public secondary schools which formed the target population. In addition, all the 147 teachers in the guidance and counselling departments in the schools were included in the study. From the population, the study sampled 15 schools and thus the total sample size yielded a total of 555 respondents. Quantitative data was obtained from the respondents using closed-ended questionnaires while secondary data was collected from observation and other available records. The results showed that there is an unequal representation among teacher counsellors with a greater majority being females. In addition, the teachers indicated that the time allotted for guidance and counselling sessions was too short and inappropriate as the sessions were scheduled during lunch break or at the end of the lesson after school at 4.00 pm. Moreover, the guidance and counselling sessions were not frequent since in most schools, the session were held when need arose. The findings further indicated that only a few students sought counselling. In general, the teachers appeared skeptical as to whether students' issues were resolved through guidance and counselling. This was attributed to several factors the main being heavy workload by both teachers and students which could have made it difficult to accomplish effective guidance and counselling. Based on the findings of the study recommends that more time should be set aside for counselling of students. Finally, in-service courses should be held for teachers in guidance and counselling on gender issues.

Keywords

Guidance, Counselling, Emotional Distress, Psychological Distress

Received: June 19, 2015 / Accepted: July 12, 2015 / Published online: August 11, 2015

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1. Introduction

The emotional and psychological status of many learners in both primary and secondary school levels in the 21st century

has been vastly affected by various aspects including substance abuse, domestic poverty, teenage issues, physical disabilities, domestic violence and early pregnancy among others such factors. This condition has caused many students feeling emotionally and psychologically disturbed. The consequences

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of this distress are dire and far-reaching. They include dropping out of school, students behaving in ways that are deemed inappropriate, failure in exams and even suicide in extreme cases. This is supported by a body of evidence that demonstrate increasing levels of mental, emotional and physiological distress among students (Kukali & Kabuka, 2009; Ndeti, 2002, Standard Digital News, 2014).

Various strategies have been discussed and enacted by the education sector in an attempt to address issues that affect students. On top of these strategies featured the strengthening and streamlining guidance and counseling services in schools as a potent panacea for the problems being faced by students (Tan and Goh, 2002). The terms “guidance and counseling” have been perceived in different ways. Kinra (2008) defined them as an interaction process co-joining the counselee, who is vulnerable and who needs assistance and the counselor who is trained and educated to give this assistance, the goal being to help the counselee learn to deal more effectively with himself and the reality of his environment. Guidance and counseling services are essential elements in discipline management of people in all societies even the most primitive societies grew out of the necessity of guiding individuals’ behavior patterns in the interests of the group.

The role of guidance and counseling in the administration and management of student discipline in Kenya has been recognized by the various government policy documents since independence starting with the Report of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies of 1976 which recommended that guidance and counseling be taught using subjects like Religious Education, Social Education and Ethics. Despite these efforts, indiscipline in schools is still on the increase.

A recent survey by Ajowi & Simatwa (2010) has revealed that all the public secondary schools in Kenya have school - based guidance and counselling services. However, despite the availability of these services, another study by Okech & Kimemia (2012) showed that most of the counselors in secondary schools are untrained. Additionally, most of the teachers tasked with guidance and counselling roles are overburdened due to the high number of students in secondary schools. This thus casts a shadow of doubt on the effectiveness of the guidance and counselling services in Kenyan secondary schools. This study thus sought to effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in secondary schools in Kenya.

2. Research Methodology

This study was conducted in Githunguri sub-county, Kiambu County. Kiambu County is a county in the former Central

Province of Kenya. Its capital is Kiambu and its largest town is Thika. The county is adjacent to the northern border of Nairobi County and has a population of 1,623,282 (Infotrack, 2009).

The sub-county had a total of 30 public secondary schools which formed the target population. These schools included boys boarding, girls boarding and mixed boarding. The total student population in the target population was 8,763 students. In addition, all the 147 teachers in the guidance and counselling departments in the schools were included in the study.

From the total population, the researcher took a sample size of 15 schools for the study which comprises of 50% of the total schools. From these schools, students and teachers from the guidance and counselling departments were then selected as respondents. According to Scheaffer *et al.* (2011), the approach where the population is equal to the sample is known as a *census survey* [approach]. Consequently, the total sample size yielded a total of 555 respondents including 408 students and 147 teachers.

The study made use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was obtained from the respondents using closed-ended questionnaires, while qualitative data relied on open ended items. In addition, secondary data was collected from observation and other available records such as departmental counselling records.

This study collected data using a questionnaire for teachers and students in the selected public secondary schools in Githunguri sub - county. The students completed the questionnaire in one sitting as the researcher waited. Teacher questionnaires were issued to the teachers and collected after a week. They were then coded according to the schools to allow ease of reference.

The coded data were entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data analysis procedures that were employed involved both qualitative and quantitative procedures. The qualitative data was quantified where possible along with data from the structured questionnaire items. Quantitative data comprised answers to close ended questions. Data were analysed and reported using frequency distributions and percentages. Data presentations were made by use of tables and frequency distributions to enhance clarity.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Questionnaire Return Rate

The study sampled 147 teachers and 408 students from the target population. The response was very high with a

majority of students (97%) and teachers (84%) responding and returning the questionnaires.

3.2. Demographic Data

The students' demographic information in the questionnaires comprised of their gender, age and class while teacher details

included their gender and teaching experience as presented in Table 1 shows the gender of the respondents.

There was a slightly higher number of female (55%) than male students (45%). The sample was also representative of students in all classes with the least students in their final year of study, Form Four.

Table 1. Gender of the Respondents.

| Gender | Teachers | | Students | | Students information Per Class | | | | | | | |
|--------|----------|-----|----------|-----|--------------------------------|----|--------|----|--------|----|--------|----|
| | | | | | Form 1 | | Form 2 | | Form 3 | | Form 4 | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Male | 37 | 30 | 178 | 45 | 45 | 11 | 61 | 15 | 56 | 14 | 16 | 4 |
| Female | 87 | 70 | 218 | 55 | 38 | 10 | 55 | 14 | 69 | 17 | 56 | 14 |
| Total | 124 | 100 | 396 | 100 | 83 | 21 | 116 | 29 | 125 | 31 | 72 | 18 |

The study findings indicated clear that there was unequal representation among teacher counsellors with a greater majority (70%) being females while the males were the minority (30 %). This disparity in gender representation of teacher counsellors as explained by one of the heads of departments in guidance and counselling may have an effect on the counselling and guidance process in public secondary schools. This is because a number of challenges may exist for female counsellors working with male adolescents, just as there could be challenges among male counsellors working with female adolescent (Katz, 1996). In particular, Katz notes that boys and girls in high schools strive harder to conform to gender stereotypes and the prevailing sexual moves (Katz, 1966), an argument that put across by Wango and Mungai (2007) who argues that gender is an issue in traditional societies were people learn to conform according to their gender.

Table 2. Age Bracket of Teachers and Students.

| Age Bracket | Teachers | | Students | |
|--------------|----------|-----|----------|-----|
| | No | % | No | % |
| 10 – 14 | - | - | 88 | 22 |
| 15 – 20 | - | - | 287 | 73 |
| 21 – 30 | 14 | 11 | 21 | 5 |
| 31 – 40 | 67 | 54 | - | - |
| 41 – 50 | 32 | 26 | - | - |
| 51 and above | 11 | 9 | - | - |
| Total | 124 | 100 | 396 | 100 |

The study also sought age information from both teachers and students. The results are tabulated in table 2. Age was important in this study since most students are at adolescence stage, which is a period of growth and maturity. At this stage, what young people want and think they can handle often differs from what adults and parents, in this case represented by teacher counsellors, are willing or think is wise to give. This creates tension, frustration, rebellion and persisting power struggles, hence the need for guidance and counselling

in schools.

Majority of students (73%) were in the 15 - 20 years age brackets. These are in the adolescence stages. However, a few students were slightly older aged between 21 and 30 years. This category of students was over aged and has tended to join school following a government policy to provide free day secondary education in 2007. Only a slightly small percentage of teachers (11%) were in the same age bracket with the older students as the majority of teachers were in the 31 – 40 (54%) and 31 - 40 (26%) age brackets. Others were over 51% (9%) and some would argue that they may have been out of touch with the young students. Alternatively, it can be argued that majority of the teachers were old and therefore experience, and in turn were capable of offering the required and informed decisions and guidance to students. This was confirmed by the years of teaching experience as summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Teaching Experience.

| Teaching Experience | No | % |
|---------------------|-----|-----|
| Below 5 years | 15 | 12 |
| 6 - 15 years | 92 | 74 |
| 16 - 25 years | 11 | 9 |
| Above 26 years | 6 | 5 |
| Total | 124 | 100 |

Findings indicate that a majority (88 %) of the teachers had a teaching experience of more than six years, with almost two thirds (74%) having taught for 6 – 15 years. This was further evidence that majority of the teachers in the secondary schools had adequate experience in working with adolescents at this critical ages. As a matter of course, it would be expected that they could identify and perhaps assist the students to resolve certain issues through guidance and counselling, and hence their appointment as teacher counsellors.

3.3. Frequency of Guidance and Counselling Sessions

The study investigated the time allocated for counselling in the schools and the frequency. This is because time is an invaluable asset that determines the effectiveness of counselling process (Wango and Mungai, 2007).

The most appropriate time for counselling was considered to be when both teachers and students were 'free', free meaning there was no formal lesson allocated in the official time table. This was during the lunch break 1.00 - 2.00 pm and after school, 4.00 - 5.00 pm. However, teachers indicated that this time was too short and inappropriate as both teachers and students were taking a lunch break or too tired at the end of the lesson after school at 4.00 pm. In addition, students were busy taking their lunch, and after school they were attending to chores or preparing to go home. Thus counselling and guidance were not as frequent and this is depicted in the table 4 below.

Table 4. Frequency of Guidance and Counselling in School.

| Frequency | Teachers | Students |
|------------------|----------|----------|
| | % | % |
| Daily | 25 | 17 |
| Fortnightly | 19 | 40 |
| Monthly | 17 | 8 |
| Termly | 9 | 16 |
| When need arises | 30 | 18 |

Findings revealed that guidance and counselling was not as frequent on a daily basis and could have been possible that judging by a sizeable proportion of teachers (30%) and students (18%) counselling of students was only possible when, and as need arose.

3.4. Number of Students Seeking Guidance and Counselling

The study collected data on the number of students seeking guidance and counselling in schools. These data was easily accessible from the guidance and counselling departments. The results are tabulated below.

Table 5. Number of Students Who Seek Counselling.

| Gender | Daily | | Monthly | | Termly | |
|---------|-------|--------|---------|---------|--------|----------|
| | 1 - 5 | 6 - 20 | 1 - 20 | 21 - 50 | 1 - 50 | Over 51> |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Males | 80 | 20 | 52 | 48 | 49 | 51 |
| Females | 44 | 56 | 35 | 65 | 30 | 70 |

Findings indicate that only a few students, especially males sought counselling. This is because an overwhelming majority of records indicated 1 - 5 males sought counselling

in a day and 1 - 20 in a month. Yet some of the schools had over 700 students. It is also clear that female students sought guidance and counselling assistances more than male students.

3.5. Methods Used in Guidance and Counselling

The study further inquired on the methods used in guidance and counselling students, if it was carried out. This is because the way a student received help could influence the outcome of therapy as well as the frequency of other students seeking help. In addition, the methods would require to be highly accepted by the students as some have already pointed out on certain aspects such as solutions and confidentiality.

It is evident that half of both teachers and students reported that counsellors used group counselling. Wango and Mungai (2007) distinguish between the terms guidance and counselling, where guidance is offering counsel and advice while counselling is the therapeutic process of offering help. It would appear that most schools guided students in groups. This is evident by the mention of guiding and counselling students by teachers in the classroom and even by principals in the assembly. Only one in three teachers and students indicated individual counselling. Yet it is evident in the ensuing discussion that both males and females may have different issues, some very sensitive that required confidentiality. How then were they handled in a group? In addition, the students would of course require the counsellors to offer empathy, understanding and unconditional positive regard (UPR), paraphrasing and reflection of feelings that are also useful skills to the young adolescents. In addition, the counsellor must at all times be able to focus on the issues that were most troubling to the client. How is this possible in a group, or groups?

That most teachers preferred the group method would imply that students were uncomfortable and unhappy and hence the reason why they did not seek help. In addition, further inquiry from teachers revealed what was 'group counselling technique'. Group counselling according to the teacher counsellors involved a small group of student members who came together forming their own specific goals, shared their problems, provided empathy and support to each other (not even provided by a teacher) and also in turn changed their self-defeating behaviours. Yet in actual group counselling, the counsellor is able to structure the activities of the group to see that a climate favourable to productive work is maintained, facilitate members' interactions, provide information that would assist help members see as alternatives to their models of behaviour and encourage the client to translate their insights into concrete action plans.

3.6. Effectiveness of the Services

The study therefore sought to find out whether the students' problems were fully addressed through guidance and counselling.

Once again, a majority of both teachers and students appeared to be saying that students' issues were addressed through guidance and counselling. But it should be noted that two in five teachers (40%) did not think so. Therefore, even if students felt their issues were handled, the teachers appear skeptical as to whether students' issues were resolved through guidance and counselling. Since this study did not witness an actual counselling session, this is an aspect that should be investigated in greater detail. This is because it is apparently difficult to say with utmost precision the extent to which the school guidance and counselling program is functional and the benefits that students derive from the program.

Nonetheless, teachers asserted that there was some behaviour modification among students after receiving counselling from teachers. Students also confessed that guidance and counselling was essential in solving learners' problems. Teachers also noted that the frequency of students seeking guidance and counselling after receiving encouragement from teachers kept increasing drastically and the occurrences of appropriate behaviour improved with subsequent counselling sessions. It is therefore possible that some students' issues that required to be sorted such as financial issues due to poverty, death and bereavement, HIV and AIDS and other illnesses cited in Wango (2006) as contemporary issues that affect young people and adolescents could not easily and quickly be resolved as immediately. This is in agreement with what Wango (2006) says, namely that certain issues are much more complex and required other interventions including administration. Such cases that were mentioned by teachers and students included rape, murder, robberies and same sex relationships (homosexuality and lesbianism). Indiscipline was still rampant in several schools while academic performance, a key concern appeared to be declining in other schools.

Overall, several factors as identified above and a heavy workload by both teachers and students could have made it difficult to accomplish effective guidance and counselling.

3.7. Teacher Counsellor Effectiveness in Handling Students' Issues

Researchers have identified the importance of the bond between a counsellor and a client, in this case a teacher and a student. The quality of this therapeutic alliance has been found to have a relationship with the outcome of counselling (Lambert & Barley, 2001). In particular, Wango and Mungai (2007) assert that guidance helps students to become aware

of personal identities, perceive clearly the nature of their person, experience their world and the aggregate of surroundings and, the people with whom they interact more deeply and completely. Lago (2005) argues that in traditional societies, that alliance had gender connotations and argues that in contemporary society, the counsellor must be able to take in the world of the client. This study therefore further investigated the teacher counsellor effectiveness in offering help to the student.

The study investigated the adequacy of guidance and counselling teachers in handling students' issues in secondary schools. Firstly, the study sought information on whether students in secondary schools sought guidance and counselling services (Wango, 2006) and secondly, he frequency, time and methods used to provide the services.

Majority of both teachers (66%) and students (67%) concurred that a good number of students did not actually seek guidance and counselling services from teachers although they were faced with challenging counselling issues. Further scrutiny on this trend from teachers revealed that students failed to seek guidance and counselling from teachers due to a variety of reasons. These were:

- 1 In some schools, teacher counsellors were also in the disciplinary committees. This amounted to a conflict of roles and hence students refused to seek guidance and counselling services from such category of teachers.
- 2 In other cases, teachers made students' issues public and thus students who were affected felt disillusioned.
- 3 Students felt that they did not receive immediate solutions to their problem presented to the teacher counsellors through guidance and counselling. For instance, there were no immediate solutions to financial issues. It is possible that this is why students preferred female counsellors rather than males as they offered possible solutions (Table 4.5 above).

Several official reports such as the Kamunge and Koech reports (Republic of Kenya, 1988; 1999 respectively) acknowledged that students in Kenyan schools faced diverse problems that require guidance and counselling services. In addition, Wango and Mungai (2007) have clarified on the role of the teacher counsellor. It is therefore interesting that the above issues have not been resolved in schools as yet.

Both students and teachers, though a minority indicated that students were seeking guidance and counselling services from teachers. The study inquired how often the guidance and counselling was carried out in schools.

Findings reveal that almost a half of both teachers and students were convinced that guidance and counselling was rarely carried out in schools. Indeed, one in three teachers

and students said guidance and counselling was never carried out in schools. This assertion by teachers and students alike was a clear indicator that although most schools could have established guidance and counselling departments, but the department was not functional.

4. Conclusion

The study findings indicated clear that there is an unequal representation among teacher counsellors with a greater majority being females. In addition, the teachers indicated that the time allotted for guidance and counselling sessions was too short and inappropriate as the sessions were scheduled during lunch break or at the end of the lesson after school at 4.00 pm. Moreover, the guidance and counselling sessions were not frequent since in most schools, the session were held when need arose. The findings further indicated that only a few students, especially females sought counselling. In general, the teachers appeared skeptical as to whether students' issues were resolved through guidance and counselling. This was attributed to several factors the main being heavy workload by both teachers and students which could have made it difficult to accomplish effective guidance and counselling.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been to improve guidance and counselling services in secondary schools.

- a) More time should be set aside for counselling of students.
- b) Rooms that ensure confidentiality should be provided.
- c) Teacher counsellors should not be engaged in disciplinary activities since that amount to role conflict.
- d) Individual counselling and not group counselling especially in mixed schools should be encouraged to assist individual students.
- e) In-service courses should be held for teachers in guidance and counselling on gender issues.

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