

Situation Analysis of Guidance and Counselling in Secondary Schools in Kenya: Can Municipality Schools Cope?

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Abstract

Need for guidance and counselling services in all learning institutions cannot be overstated. Globally, it is evident that students in all levels of learning and in educational institutions have needs that call for guidance and counselling services, which if unattended could lead to numerous disciplinary issues and wastage. The purpose of this study was to find out ways in which guidance and counselling in a study site with 24 secondary schools is carried out (N=24).

Questionnaires were distributed to the guidance and counselling teachers in the respective schools and collected with 70% return rate. Results of the study showed that 89% of the respondents were qualified to teach in secondary schools. However, 59% of all the respondents had no formal training in guidance and counselling although they offered the services in their respective schools. Students seek guidance and counselling services for various reasons which range from drug and alcohol use and related behaviours, boy- girl relationships, parent- child conflict and career choices. In this paper we discuss challenges faced by guidance and counselling teachers in the study site and recommend ways in which educational institutions could facilitate guidance and counselling teachers carry out their responsibilities efficiently. We recommend approaches that could help guide social and health interventions in both primary and secondary schools and consequently impact positively on the management of the learning institutions.

Background Information

In the process of growing up, many young people globally are faced with numerous social problems. The need to explore and understand oneself increases during adolescence and early adulthood. This is also the period when young people are preoccupied with issues of sexuality, experiment with drugs and at times have trouble with authority (MOEST, 2001). Personal relationships such as dating, love and sex gain importance in their life yet majority lack adequate knowledge on these issues in addition to coping and decision making skills (Khamasi, 2007b). A substantial number also lack courage or self esteem needed to seek explanations or dialogue with significant others. This is a trying period in relation to their physical, emotional, social and spiritual development not to mention problems emanating from academic challenges (see Khamasi, 2001). Adults including teachers believe that adolescents need direction and control which is often resented because the latter feel they should be treated like grown-ups. The actual and expected changes affect students both academically and socially and there is need for guidance and counselling not only for correction but also for encouragement.

The education system in Kenya has historically placed emphasis on academic performance aimed at getting white collar jobs. Secondary schools are evaluated by the public on how many students qualify for admission to the public universities whereas primary schools are judged on how many students are eligible for admission into the highly valued government funded secondary schools. Teachers and students alike are therefore pressurized to attain high grades

and those who are seen to perform below parental and government expectations are judged harshly.

Generally teachers are assigned various administrative and facilitative duties in addition to teaching. Those in boarding schools are expected to serve students beyond the classroom and on full time basis unlike those who work in non-residential schools. Lack of a conducive environment that would nurture pedagogical relationship (Khamasi, 2002) between teachers and students has at times resulted in unrests and indiscipline in secondary schools as reported in a Ministry of Education Report on Student Discipline and Unrest in Secondary Schools (MOEST 2001). From the recommendations in the report, the government instituted policies with regard to the management of secondary schools. Among them was the deployment of teachers with professional qualifications in guidance and counselling to secondary schools (MOEST, 2001; Kamunge, 1993).

Despite the government's efforts to stem out the culture of unrest, the students continue to be violent and destructive in a number of schools because they are interested in a variety of things around them and at times devote undue attention to destructive behavior which affects learning (Muchemi, 2001). Apart from unrest, secondary school students are faced with questions about sex and interpersonal relationships. Owing to the natural human development process, students become more sensitive and self-conscious about their physical changes and also experience emotional disturbances (Wambua & Khamasi, 2004). They become self-absorbed as they try to understand themselves. A counsellor who understands these problems can offer the required information for guidance. An effective guidance and counselling program is therefore needed as an intervention measure. Counselling can help a student understand her/himself and problems encountered from their perspective. Guidance can also promote self esteem that could lead to high academic achievements. By the final year of secondary schooling, students are expected to make decisions about life thereafter. Vocational guidance is therefore important to help them in selecting and preparing for careers of their choice. The importance of guidance and counselling cannot therefore be ignored.

The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education invests heavily in education at all levels of learning. Between 2003 and 2007, universal primary education (UPE) was implemented, a move that contributed to high enrolment in public primary schools. Education is looked upon not only as a means of personal advancement but also as an asset of fundamental importance to society (Eshiwani, 1993). However, it has been found out that students who clamor for education and succeed in gaining admission to schools at times perform far below the expected standards (Rao, 2002) both socially and academically. Questions arise as to why this is the case.

A report of the Task Force on Student Indiscipline and Unrest (MOEST) (2001) recommended that teachers adopt ways of dealing with depressed and problem students and to avoid use of corporal punishment. The report recommended several measures that touched on guidance and counselling in secondary schools. It also recommended that training in guidance and counselling in all public and private universities be given high priority (2001). In response, a number of public universities in Kenya currently offer degrees in guidance and counselling while the Ministry of Education reciprocates by guaranteeing study leave for successful applicants to such

programs. In 2001, the government established the Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI) and one of its aims is to offer short courses for teachers in guidance and counselling.

Counselling as a practice has become the norm in educational institutions globally. In Kenya and in the study site in particular, the adolescents and young adults are not a homogenous group but persons who come from highly stratified social economic, political and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Given the fact that students come from varied backgrounds and encounter related challenges, there is need for guidance and counselling programs in all secondary schools in Kenya to help them cope with personal and educational challenges. This study aimed at looking at the situation of guidance and counselling programs in secondary schools in one of the fastest growing and fifth largest municipality in Kenya and to assess whether they can cope with the demand.

The Study

This was a cross-sectional survey. At the time of the study, the municipality had 24 secondary schools spread over four zones. The schools fall under two categories -- public and private. Public schools are owned and run by the Government of Kenya through boards of governors, whereas the latter are privately owned either by individuals or organizations. For the purpose of this study, the schools were classified according to whether they are single sex or co-educational. The target population consisted of all teacher counsellors in the 24 (100%) secondary schools within the municipality. Self administered questionnaire was developed and used to generate data. The research tool included both open and closed ended questions and was hand delivered to the respondents' in the respective schools. On the day of delivery, the first author introduced herself to the respondents and explained the objectives of the study. The discussion also included the possible date of collecting the questionnaire from each respondent. It is at the point of issuing the questionnaire that an appointment for picking it up was set.

Findings and Discussions

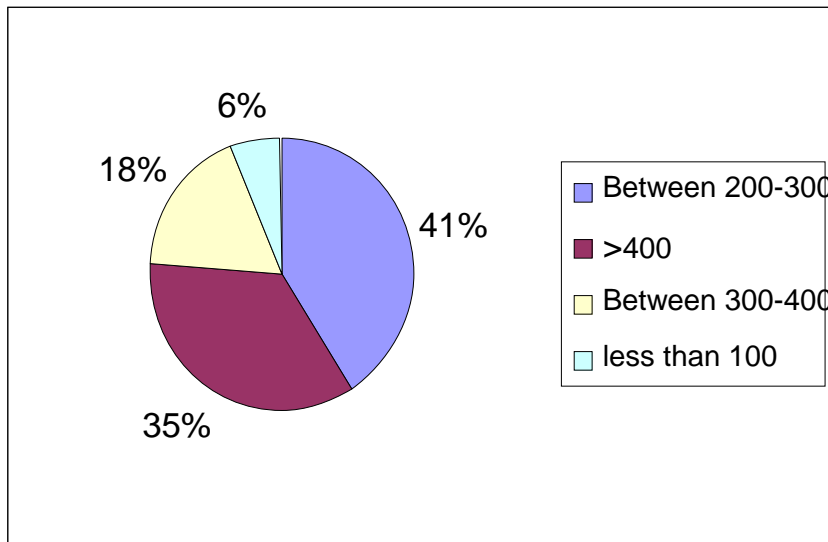
The sample for this study consisted of 24 (100%) teacher counsellors in schools within the selected municipality. Seventy percent of the respondents (70%) filled and returned the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics are used to present the data and the findings.

In the following sections, results are discussed as per the headings: - gender, student population in the schools, counselling office and office hours, academic qualifications of the respondents, years of teaching experience, problems faced by students and ways of improving guidance and counselling in the schools.

Gender of the Respondents: Thirty five percent (35%) of the respondents were males while 65% were females. Majority of the teacher counsellors in the schools within the municipality were female irrespective of whether the school is a boys' only school or not. This shows that more female teachers are assigned counselling duties than male teachers. The assignment confirms the societal held belief that women are better nurturers and care takers of children and families, which in a school setting denies men teachers the chance to be counsellors.

Population of Schools: As shown in Figure 1, 41% of the schools had between 200-300 students, while only 6% had less than 100 students. Thirty five percent (35%) had more than 400 students whereas 18% had between 300-400 students. With only one designated teacher counsellor per school, this means that most counsellors could be overworked.

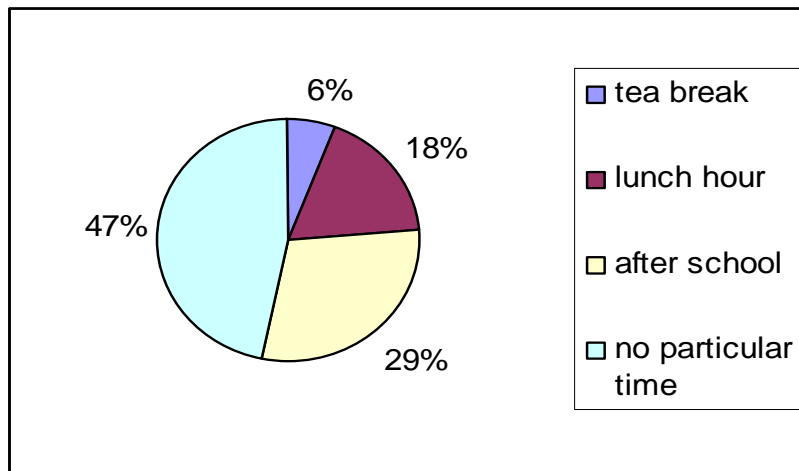
Figure 1 Population of Schools



Counselling Space and Office hours: The availability of a counselling office was also considered in analyzing the situation of guidance and counselling within the municipality. Sixty five percent (65%) of the respondents reported having an office allocated while 30% reported none. Lack of private space in schools for use by teacher counsellors makes it difficult to attend to students' needs.

It was also important to find out whether the counsellors had allocated time per day when students could visit for counselling and other matters. Forty seven percent (47%) of the respondents had no particular time allocated to serve students. They therefore counselled students when they had time off from other duties or when need arose. Twenty nine percent (29%) reported that they see students in the afternoons after classes; 18% stated that they serve students during lunch break, whereas 6% mentioned 10.00 o'clock tea break as the set aside time for students to consult. Absence of official time when students can consult teacher counsellors implies that the latter are hardly available to the students because they are engaged in other school activities. Unless a student has a pressing need, in most cases they do not seek counselling services.

Figure 2 **Office Hours**



Academic Qualifications of Teacher Counsellors: For one to qualify to teach in secondary schools in Kenya, one has to have a minimum of a diploma certificate in education. Fifty nine percent (59%) of the teacher counsellors indicated that they had a first degree, 20% had Diploma in Education, 18% had masters degree, while 20% had other unspecified qualifications. This shows that the majority of the teacher counsellors (89%) are qualified to teach in secondary schools and therefore in away prepared to work with adolescents.

In terms of responsibilities, 47% of them were class teachers while another 47% were heads of guidance and counselling departments in their respective schools. This shows that the teachers have additional time to interact with the students through other responsibilities other than during guidance and counselling sessions.

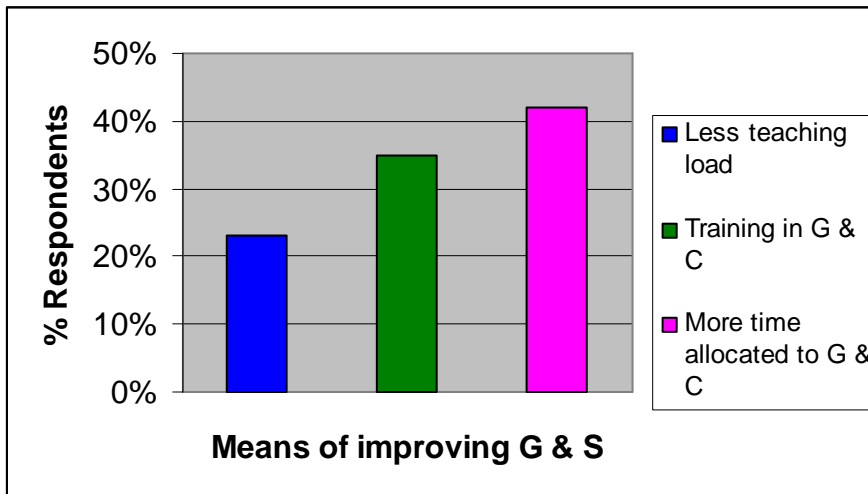
Years of Experience: Forty-two percent (42%) had less than 5 years of experience, 30% had 5-10 years, whereas only 23% had more than 10 years. This is evidence that the teacher counsellors had adequate experience as teachers and have knowledge of students' behavior and sub-cultures which should contribute to a better understanding of what could be termed as behavior problems.

Problems Faced by Students: The respondents reported that from experience students had many concerns. These included drug abuse which could be informed by the fact that 22 of the 24 schools are non-residential and students could be exposed to drug peddlers regularly on their way to school and back home. Other issues of concern are boy-girl relationships, parent-child conflicts, career choices, academic matters and other undisclosed social issues. The problems were reported as common in all the schools but the researchers were unable to determine the magnitude in each of the schools. The fact that these problems were experienced in all the schools was an indication of the need for sustainable counselling services (see Wambua & Khamasi, 2004).

Improving Guidance and Counselling: The teacher counsellors were asked how they felt counselling services would be improved in their respective schools. Forty-two percent (42%) indicated that it was necessary to allocate more time for guidance and counselling, 35% reported that training was required specifically in guidance and counselling, whereas 23% stated that the teaching load for counselling teachers in schools be reduced to allow them more time to attend to students.

The teacher counsellors were therefore in agreement that if they were allocated less teaching load they would have more time for guidance and counselling and thus concentrate more on the students who need assistance. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Improving Guidance and Counselling



Summary

The results show that secondary schools within the municipality have teacher counsellors who are meant to guide and counsel students. Sixty five percent (65%) of the respondents have a counselling office while 35% do not. This is an indication that majority of the teacher counsellors had physical space where they meet their clients in private. It was also revealed that 47% of the teacher counsellors had not allocated any specific time to serve clients because they were engaged in other school activities. Hence they only met students when need arose. However, 29% had set time after school, 18% during lunch hour, whereas 6% served students during 10 o'clock tea break.

The findings also indicate that 89% of the teacher counsellors were qualified to teach in secondary schools and 18% of them had master degrees in education. Apart from guidance and counselling the teachers had other responsibilities in the schools with 47% being class teachers,

47% heads of department and 6% had other responsibilities. This showed that the teachers had other opportunities to interact with students in addition to counselling sessions. Asked how they would like guidance and counselling services improved in the schools, the respondents reported that they would like more time allocated to guidance and counselling services (42%), 35% indicated that training in guidance and counselling is necessary and 23% said that their teaching load should be reduced.

Students were found to encounter a variety of problems ranging from drug abuse, boy-girl relationships, career choices and social issues. These problems are mostly directed to teacher counsellors to help students cope. Based on the problems, the teacher counsellors reported that they needed to dedicate more time to guidance and counselling and this could only be achieved if they were allocated fewer lessons. They also reported the need for specialized training in guidance and counselling in order to have adequate skills to guide and counsel the students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. The situation of guidance and counselling in secondary schools in our study site is above average, a reflection of the gains made by the Ministry of Education in Kenya in the last 10 years. Majority of the respondents are adequately trained to teach in secondary schools. A substantial number has some training in guidance and counselling. However there are those who take up the responsibility without additional knowledge or skills on guidance and counselling except what they may have gained in the pre-service teacher training. This is possible given that awareness has been created in schools for the need to take issues raised by students and problems encountered seriously as a way of averting riots and corresponding behavior problems. Secondary school managers seem to have realized that guidance and counselling is an important aspect of school administration. In that regard, most schools have allocated office space for teacher counsellors, a trend that should be institutionalized in all schools. In addition, teacher counsellors need to set specific office hours and also be flexible enough to hold dialogue with students on demand.
2. The social-economic problems faced by students are a reflection of the society at large. The study site is a municipality and a town that is exponentially growing into a metropolis. Most of the students in the non-residential public schools come from highly populated areas. The challenges of growing up in inner city neighborhoods include living in households earning less than a one dollar a day, in big families where provision of basic necessities is limited, and where living space is inadequate and therefore may affect a student's academic performance. High density areas are also neighborhoods where illicit substances are easily available and therefore contribute to behavior problems among adolescence and young adults. Behavior problems are often induced by early sex debut among pre-teens and involvement in intergenerational sexual practices, which are contributing factors to HIV infections among school going teenagers. Teacher counsellors in the municipality therefore need to have knowledge and tact in addressing the problems and above all, they must be able to understand the students' social-

economic backgrounds and tailor counselling sessions and intervention activities accordingly.

3. Ninety four percent (94%) of the teacher counsellors in the study are allocated other school responsibilities and are therefore unable to devote adequate time for serving students. This reflects the teacher student ratio in Kenya generally. Student population in Kenya has grown exponentially given that a critical mass of the population is young and school going. There is need for government to hire more teachers per school in order for the teacher counsellors to be released from additional responsibilities and therefore concentrate on guiding and counselling students.
4. Counsellors also need to have a good understanding of the practical and strategic gender needs of boys and girls in their respective environment. In addition, the family as a social institution is undergoing tremendous changes. It is therefore important for the Ministry of Education through institutions such as School Management Boards and Parent Teacher Associations to consider the home as the space where counselling and guidance should begin in a child's life.
5. A Training Manual on Guidance and Counselling could be developed to harmonise training in Kenya as part of the Teacher Training Curriculum. This would give students a choice to seek counselling from the teachers they feel comfortable to approach.
6. Guidance and Counselling need to be given priority in the school strategic plans with commitment from Ministry of Education/Government other than being taken as an extra-curricular activity. In addition, the counsellors need to be remunerated accordingly and the allowance factored in their salaries.
7. Media has great impact on social lives of young people. There is need for various government institutions working with children and the youth and the media to collaborate with the Ministry of Education in the development of appropriate interventions to support counselling and guidance in schools.
8. Forms of counselling services could be varied in the school system and may depend on how each teacher approaches her/his call for duty. Further research should be carried out in secondary schools to determine effectiveness of guidance and counselling programs in secondary schools and students' attitudes towards guidance and counselling.

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