

Students' Perception on the Role of Guidance and Counselling Services on Behavior in Private Secondary Schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.801022>

Received: 07 December 2023; Accepted: 20 December 2023; Published: 26 January 2024

ABSTRACT

Despite availability of guidance and counselling services in many secondary schools, many students are reluctant to seek those services. Students' attitude is important in determining the uptake of guidance and counselling services. Therefore, this study sought to determine the perception of students on the role of guidance and counselling services on behavior change among students in selected private secondary schools in Bugesera District in Rwanda. The study's objectives were: to determine students' perception on the aims of guidance and counselling services; to examine the attitude of students towards guidance and counselling; and to interrogate the students' perception on the role of guidance and counselling services on behavior change among students. The study was grounded on Gestalt Theory of Perception and Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. The target population was 860 students from two private secondary schools. A sample of 274 was drawn using both convenient and probability systematic sampling techniques. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires. The research employed descriptive survey design. The study established that most students perceived the aims of guidance and counselling services as that of helping them improve their academic performance (84.2%); prevent early pregnancies (81.6%); provide information in making career choices (81.6%) as well as raising students' self-esteem (79.5%). The study also revealed that the attitude of students was positive as 73.1% were willing to seek counselor's help; 70.6% were ready to see a counselor or referred elsewhere when necessary while 70.6% were willing to be referred to see a counselor. The study revealed that most students perceived the role of guidance and counselling in behavior change as effective in reducing crimes in schools (86.2%); helping students perform better in co-curriculum activities (82%); improve students' study habits (80.9%) as well as increases students' self-esteem (80.9%). This implied that most students perceived the role of guidance and counselling as effective in influencing behavior change. The study recommended that the school administrators should sustain efforts to promote positive attitudes towards seeking counseling help.

Key Terms: guidance and counselling, attitude, students, behavior change

INTRODUCTION

Globally, guidance and counselling services have been found to be instrumental in enhancing behavior change in varying societies. Guidance and counselling developed during the 19th century and were popularized in Europe and America (Chisenga, 2021) after the Second World War. The same author added that following the Industrial Revolution, a lot of attention was given to vocational guidance. School guidance and counselling developed in British schools in response to changes in society, family life, and school environments that need more attention to individual needs.

Bird et al. (2020), investigated college students' attitudes, stigma and intentions toward seeking online and face to face counselling in the United States of America. The study findings indicated that there was significant higher level of self-stigma and discomfort toward online counselling but most students had a positive attitude towards face-to-face counselling. Hence, face-to-face counselling method was found to be more favorable service delivery compared to online counselling.

Missanjo et al (2021), investigated the perception of university and college students towards guidance and counselling services in Malawi. The results of this study indicated that the psychological needs of students differed. The main symptoms were stress, depression, and anxiety. However, the goals of guidance and counselling services were perceived to be acquisition of knowledge and skills for one to succeed in life and assistance in the development of problem-solving skills.

In another study by Kiptala and Kipruto (2021), students' perception of the influence of guidance and counselling services and academic performance in Baringo County, Kenya, was carried out. The study revealed that students perceived guidance and counselling services positively.

In Rwanda, Dieudonne (2022) carried out a study on the assessment of service delivery in guidance and counselling units in selected polytechnics in Rwanda. The study findings established that guidance and counselling helped students to develop positive attitudes towards learning as well as helping them to approach exams without fear and improve concentration in studying.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive survey design and quantitative data analysis. It was used to examine students' attitude towards guidance and counselling on behaviour change. The study was carried out in Bugesera District in Eastern Province, Rwanda. The target population was 860 students. These students were aged between 12-18 and above, with 53% being girls while 47% were boys from Form 2 to Form 6. The sample was determined using Fisher's formula $n = \frac{Z^2 P Q}{E^2}$. The study employed both convenience sampling and systematic sampling methods to arrive at 274 respondents.

Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the internal consistency which scored 0.940. The questionnaires contained 3 demographic information items and 30 items on a 5-point Likert Scale. The Scale ranged from 1-5. The scores were as follows: Strongly Agree was 1 (1.0-1.80 = Positive); Agree was 2 (1.81-2.60 = positive), Undecided was 3 (2.61-3.40 = Neutral); Disagree was 4 (4.1-4.20 = Negative) and Strongly Disagree was 5 (4.21-5.0 = Negative).

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

Gender Distribution indicated that female respondents accounted for 51.5% of the total respondents while male respondents accounted for the remaining 48.5%. This implied that female respondents outnumbered their male counterparts by a small margin. The Class or Form distribution indicated that the highest number of respondents (31.6%) was studying in Senior Six while Senior Four and Five had equal representation at 26.1% each. S3 had 15.1% while S2 had 1.1%. This implied that the upper classes had the highest representation which augured well for the study because they were deemed to have adequate school experience to understand issues pertaining to guidance and counseling. Age Distribution indicated that the highest number of respondents was aged 18 years and above at 67% followed by those aged 15-17 years at 26% while the least number of respondents were aged 12 to 14 years at 7%. This implied that the majority of respondents had attained the age of 18 years and above which is also critical in terms of requiring

guidance and counselling services.

Attitude of Students Towards Guidance and Counselling in Private Secondary Schools in Bugesera District, in Rwanda?

Table 1: Attitude of students towards guidance and counselling services

Attitude of students towards guidance and counselling services	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N
Statements	%	%	%	%	%	
1. I am receptive to a person or counselor interested in my life challenges	39.7	27.2	8.5	10.3	14.3	272
2. Having a nervous breakdown, the first inclination would be to get counselling	38.6	30.5	7.0	12.5	11.4	272
3. To be wise to seek a counselor's help	48.5	24.6	3.3	10.7	12.9	272
4. To be advised by a close friend that a counselor	33.8	16.2	5.9	27.2	16.9	272
5. Willing to confide intimate matters to an appropriate person	33.8	26.5	16.2	12.1	11.4	272
6. To be recommended to see a counselor	42.3	27.2	4.8	9.9	15.8	272
7. To welcome external help	36.4	18.0	7.4	14.7	23.5	272
8. To see a counselor due to making referrals where and when necessary	46.0	24.6	7.4	12.9	9.2	272
9. To get a help because counselors respect students right to confidentiality.	44.1	19.5	8.5	10.7	17.3	272
10. To find counselling when worried or disturbed for a prolonged period.	36.0	23.5	14.0	11.0	15.4	272

Table 1 showed that, cumulatively, the attitude of students towards guidance and counselling was reflected on their willingness to seek counsellors help as evidenced by 73.1% of the respondents, closely followed by 70.6% who indicated being ready to see a counselor or referred elsewhere when necessary while another 70.6% indicated their willingness to be referred to see a counselor. Further, 69.1% indicated their willingness to seek for counselling services whenever they experienced nervous breakdown while another 66.9% indicate that they were receptive to a person or counselor who wanted to know about their personal difficulties.

Correlation between Demographic Characteristics and Students Attitude Towards Guidance and Counselling

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics and Attitude of students Towards Guidance and Counseling

Demographic Characteristics		Attitude
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.139*

Class level	Pearson Correlation	-.089
Age group	Pearson Correlation	.138*

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between demographic characteristics and students' attitude towards guidance and counselling. There was a positive correlation between gender and attitude ($r = .139, p < .005$). The Pearson correlation tests shows that gender scored a Pearson Correlation (r) of .139, which is a positive correlation, Class level scored ($r = -.089, p < .005$) which is a negative correlation while Age group scored ($r = .138, p < .005$), which is a positive correlation. This implied that both gender and age group had a positive influence on students' attitude towards guidance and counselling while class level had no significant influence.

DISCUSSION

The study established that the attitude of students towards guidance and counselling was positive. This was manifested by their willingness to seek counsellors' help as evidenced by 73.1% of the respondents who were ready to see a school counselor or be referred elsewhere when necessary. Another group comprising 70.6% expressed their willingness to be referred to see a counselor. The attitudes expressed by these respondents represented the majority of the students. This implied that most students perceived guidance and counselling services in a positive light and as helpful in their school and life in general. Overall, these positive attitudes suggest a healthy perception of the role of guidance and counseling in students' lives. It indicates a level of trust in the counseling process, an understanding of the potential benefits of seeking help, and a willingness to engage in the therapeutic relationship. As educators and counselors, recognizing and fostering these positive attitudes can contribute to a more supportive and mentally healthy school environment. It may also encourage the development of proactive strategies for addressing challenges and promoting overall well-being among students.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between the demographic characteristics of gender, class level and age against students' attitude towards guidance and counselling. The Pearson correlation test on gender scored a correlation (r) of .139, which was positive, Class level scored ($r = -.089, p < .005$) which was a negative, while Age group scored ($r = .138, p < .005$), which was positive. This implied that both gender and age group had a positive influence on students' attitude towards guidance and counselling while class level had no significant influence.

The study shows that, on average, once gender (either male or female) tends to have an influence on attitude toward guidance and counseling. It also implied that as students get older (move from one age group to another), their attitudes toward guidance and counseling become more positive.

The highest number of the respondents considered guidance and counselling a factor in behavior change among students in various ways. Respondents accounting for 86.2% indicated that it helps to reduce crimes in schools; 82% were of the opinion that it helps students to perform better in co-curriculum activities while 80.9% indicated that it improves students' study habits while another 80.9% pointed out that it increases students' self-esteem.

These research findings highlighted the multifaceted positive impact of guidance and counseling students. The interventions not only address specific behavioral issues but also contribute to broader aspects of personal development, academic success, and social interaction. As a result, schools may consider continued investment in counseling services as part of a comprehensive approach to promoting a positive and conducive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussions, this study concludes that most of the students' attitude towards guidance and counselling was positive as they were willing to seek counsellors' help or to be referred elsewhere when necessary. The study also concluded that guidance and counselling services were perceived to be able to reduce crimes in schools, help students to perform better in co-curriculum activities, help to improve students' study habits and increase students' self-esteem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations:

The Ministry of Education should collaborate with educators to integrate counseling support into all academic programs. This can include providing resources for study, time management, and stress reduction to enhance academic performance.

The policy makers should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for counselors to stay updated on best practices in counseling, especially in areas such as career guidance, academic support, and addressing specific behavioral issues.

The school administrators should build on the positive impact identified in reducing crimes, improving study habits, and increasing self-esteem by implementing initiatives that foster a positive and inclusive school climate. This may include anti-bullying campaigns, conflict resolution programs, and character education.

The school administrators should sustain efforts to promote positive attitudes towards seeking counseling help. This can involve ongoing awareness campaigns, testimonials from students who have benefited, and normalization of mental health conversations within the school community.

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