Students Perceptions on School Counselors and the Counseling Services Provided in Secondary Schools in Konoin Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Schools with the support of the Ministry of Education have worked tirelessly to eliminate disruptive tendencies in learning institutions. However, despite all the efforts, students' unrests have continued to be witnessed in many secondary schools. Many a time, these unrests have been violent and destructive of property and even life. There seems to be a lack of effective alternative strategies to contain students' indiscipline. Although guidance and counseling has worked in many different situations, its effectiveness in the management of discipline in secondary schools has not been established especially from the students' perceptions on their counselor(s) and the counseling services that are availed in their schools. The purpose of this study therefore was to examine students perceptions on School Counselors and the Counseling Services Provided in Secondary Schools in Konoin Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the study employed a descriptive survey research design. A sample size of 327 students was chosen from a population of 2200 students who comprised of all the form three students in the 40 Secondary schools in Konoin sub-county, Bomet County. Thereafter, simple random sampling was adopted in selecting actual respondents for the study. The study adopted the *ex post facto* research design in which survey method of cross sectional type was used to collect data using a self made five- point likert scale with the following response categories: Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Not Sure = 3; Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5.The findings revealed that students had negative perceptions on seeking counseling services and lacked confidence (60%) in school counselors who were perceived not to have the ability to help and lacked ethics (58%). The implication of this finding was that the more the students had negative perceptions on the school counselors and the counsling services availed to them, the higher the likelihood of the students not to seek counseling services in school and also from their counseling teachers. From the findings, it is recommended that the ministry of education provide targeted professional learning and development for school leaders and people working in guidance and counseling roles.

Keywords: Students perceptions, school counselors, counseling services

INTRODUCTION

The emotional and psychological status of many students in secondary schools has been vastly affected by various challenges including drug and substance abuse, early pregnancy, poverty, domestic violence, truancy and many other such factors. These challenges have made many students feel emotionally and psychologically disturbed. The consequences of experiences are dire and far-reaching. They include dropping out of school, failure in examinations and even suicide in extreme cases. This is supported by a body of evidence that demonstrate increasing levels of mental, emotional and psychological distress among students (Kukali &

Kabuka, 2019; Ndetei, 2018, and Standard Digital News, 2014).

The role of Guidance and counseling in administration and management of discipline in Kenya has been recognized by various government policy documents since independence. The report of the National Committee on educational objectives and policies of 1976 recommended that guidance and counseling be taught in schools through such subjects as Religious Education, Social Education and Ethics. A recent survey by Ajowi & Simatwa (2021) has revealed that all schools in Kenya have guidance and counseling services. However, despite the availability of Guidance and counseling services in schools, another study by Oketch & Kimemia (2019) showed that most of the counselors in secondary schools were untrained. Additionally, most of the teachers tasked with guidance and counseling roles were overburdened due to the high number of students in secondary schools. This casts a shadow of doubt on the effectiveness of the guidance and counseling as a promising students' discipline management strategy in secondary schools in Kenya.

A study by Agil, (2020) in Nigeria on the evaluation of students' perception of school counseling and their attitudes toward its programs showed that majority (72.5%) of the students had unfavorable attitudes towards Counseling while 27.5% had favorable attitudes. This could be as a result of low levels of awareness of the importance of counseling. It meant that a lot has to be done to raise the status of counseling in Cross River State in Nigeria where the study was done to improve students' perception and attitudes to it. It was also noted that Nigerian school system was threatened by a plethora of social problems such as secret cults, gangster's and insecurity.

Schools with the support of the Ministry of Education have worked tirelessly to eliminate disruptive tendencies in learning institutions. However, despite all the efforts, students' unrests have continued to be witnessed in many secondary schools. Many a time, these unrests have been violent and destructive of property and even of life. There seems to be a lack of effective alternative strategies to contain students' indiscipline. Although guidance and counseling has worked in many different situations, its effectiveness in the management of discipline in secondary schools has not been established especially from the students' perceptions on their counselor(s) and the counseling services that are availed in their schools. This study therefore sought to examine students' perceptions on school counselors and the counseling services availed to them in secondary schools in Konoin Sub County, Bomet County, Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1979) who viewed learning by observing others as the role model. The theory emphasizes on learning that take place within the social context. The theory states that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling. The theory proposes that after observing the model, the learner observes mentally, processes the information by selecting, organizing the incoming stimuli from the environment into a cognitive of map. This shows that behaviour, personal (and cognitive), and environmental factors operate interactively. Behaviour can influence personal factors and vice versa. The person's cognitive activities can influence the environment; the environment can change the person's cognition, and so on.

As was the case with other behaviorists, Bandura believes that punishment in whatever form does not work as well as reinforcement and may backfire on us (Boeree, 1998). It is therefore very clear from this study that students can be motivated to model both positive and negative behaviors. This is why students' model desired behaviors for those they want to please, and in the next instance, they will model negative behavior in order to get the attention they are seeking.

Skinner (1938) was a behaviorist who argued that every personality is the product of environmental experiences. In this study, it is posted that the Head teacher and teachers should work cooperatively in guiding and counseling students for the purpose of achieving high standards of discipline. On the other hand, students have to see themselves, as instruments, which the future society depends upon. Thus, they should aim to be role models. To the theorists, students must accept and adhere to the rules and regulations within the school organizations. As students, they are expected to enhance their capabilities, opportunities and abilities in life, which are provided by the school curriculum.

METHODS

The target population of this study was 2200 students who comprised all the form three students in the 40 Secondary schools in Konoin sub-county, Bomet County. The sample comprised of 327 respondents drawn from various schools in Konoin Sub County. The sample was determined according to Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table at 5% margin of error. Krejcie& Morgan (ibid) as cited by Amin (2005) recommend that for a population of 2200, a sample of 327 is adequate since a large sample will not make any difference in the study results. In order to obtain a sample for this study, the researcher obtained the list of all the schools in Konoin Sub-county from the sub-county education office. The researcher first stratified the schools according to gender and finally used simple random sampling. In the single sex schools, simple random sampling was used to obtain the sample. To achieve this objective, the study adopted descriptive survey design. Primary data was collected by use of self-administered questionnaires and interview schedules, while secondary data was collected from key informants who included konoin County Education officers and libraries. Data collected was analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences and Microsoft Excel software. The results of the data analysis were presented in form of tabular summaries. Analyzed data was presented in frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

A descriptive analysis was run on the six statements in the questionnaire aimed at evaluating students' perceptions on their counselor(s) and the counseling services that are availed in their schools. The results are presented in table 1

Table 1. Students' perceptions on their counselor(s) and the counseling services that are availed in their schools

Item	Statement	UD	D	A	Total
1.	Seeking for counseling services mean you have a mental problem	0	28.7	71.3	100
2.	Only those who have difficulties in learning seek counseling services	0	52.8	42.7	100
3.	Counseling is for delinquents	14.9	39.7	45.6	100
4.	Counselors are not confidential	17.8	40.6	41.6	100
5.	Counselors lack ethics	24.8	33.7	41.5	100
6.	Counselors do not have the ability to help	14.9	30.7	54.5	100

It can be observed from table 1 that the respondents agreed with the five statements implying that students had negative perceptions on seeking counseling services and lacked confidence in school counselors who were perceived not to have the ability to help and lacked ethics. The respondents disagreed with the second statement implying that not only those who have difficulties in learning seek counseling services.

DISCUSSION

The majority (71.3%) of the students' agreed with the opinion on that if one sought for counseling services it meant that they had mental problems. They also opined that people with difficulties in learning (42.7%) sought guidance and counseling. According to Battet al. (2012), such perceptions about counseling can discourage students' participation in counseling programs. Gysbers and Anderson (2017) add that such negative perceptions are influenced byinadequate understanding of counseling and the benefits that students may derive

from their participation.It was also found out by the study that 45.6%believed that guidance and counseling was meant for delinquents. This observation was in agreement with Herr (2018) who holds that counseling is recommended for only delinquents. Thus, students may avoid counseling as an effort to avoid being labeled as delinquents. In this case, the study established that 45.6% of the sampled students agreed that only delinquent students were referred to counselors, while 39.7%disagreed with the statement. This showed that a greater section of the student populace stigmatized students who sought counseling as delinquents. In Kuhn's (2014) study such perceptions challenge voluntary participation in counseling program and also threaten the sustainability of the entire program.

The study emphasizes that perceptions held about the counselors, including their trustworthiness and confidentiality influences decisions to participate in counseling program. Thus, it is important for students to have positive perceptions about the counselors' traits as well as the confidentiality of the program. This is because private issues may be directly or indirectly expressed during counseling, under the desperation of seeking help from the counselor. The study therefore explored the perceptions that students hold about their counselors' traits and the confidentiality of the counseling program.

The study revealed that a greater percentage of the respondents (41.5%) agreed to the fact that their counselors were not confidential. According to Rea and Parker (2016), it is believed that there is a moderately strong association between gender and their perceptions on the counselors' confidentiality. According to Urombo (2021), the perceived un-confidentiality of counselors often impedes voluntary solicitation of counseling services. Compulsory counseling of students does not fully disclose salient issues that can help solve the problem at hand.

The study showed that 41.5% of the sampled students agreed that their counselors were non-ethical. According to Okuma (2015), ethical issues concerns practices such as counselor-student relationship and codes of conduct about disclosing private information of the client. A greater section of respondents believed that their counselors do not keep secrets, thus, branding their counselors as unethical. Further examination revealed that statistically significant section of students (54.5%) was of the view that counselors could help them overcome their challenges. This meant that the perceptions that students had formed about the counselors' abilities could have strongly determined their participation in the counseling programs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study revealed that some perceptions of students can discourage them from seeking counseling services, for example, the perception that counseling was for only delinquents. Students mainly associated the counseling programs in their schools with mental problems and hence kept off from such services. The study recommended that the ministry of education ensure the guidance staff entitlement and ensure better remuneration in alignment with their roles, provide targeted professional learning and development for school leaders and people working in guidance and counseling roles, and encourage schools to goals and approaches related to student wellbeing and /or guidance and counseling in annual and strategic planning and to report on the same.

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