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## EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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### Abstract:

The school counseling program is meant to assist students to deal with psycho-social and behavioral challenges, which normally affect their academic performance. In order to achieve this goal, the Kenyan government has previously committed resources towards establishing counseling programs in schools. The aim of this study was to establish how effective these counseling programs are in assisting secondary school learners in Kiambu County to achieve academically. Primary data was derived from 80 high school adolescents, 8 counselors, and 8 academic Dean of Students who were purposively sampled from 8 schools that were randomly selected. The study was qualitatively done, and self-determination theory was used to guide the study. Data were analyzed for the identification of counseling programme characteristics and student improvement indices. These were presented in tables, charts, frequencies, and percentages based on the responses from the respondents. Further, a correlation between the two variables of the study was examined. Findings depicted that 65.7% of the students sampled said that counseling services offered at school satisfied their needs, 74.3% reported an improvement in their academic performance as a result of those counseling services and 87% felt more positive about school life after receiving counseling services. The study concluded that comprehensive counseling programs improved academic performance among high school students. The study intended to inform education planners, principals, and administrators on the role counseling would play in enhancing academic achievement among secondary school students.

### Keywords:

Counseling Services, Academic Achievement, Self-Determination

## **Introduction**

School counseling is meant to assist students deal with challenges, which normally affect their academic performance. It enables students to grow holistically and to live more fulfilling lives because they are able to deal with their problematic issues. They are able to adjust emotionally, socially, psychologically and to attain self-awareness which in turn enhances their academic performance.

A study conducted among adolescents recruited from high schools in United States of America examined the influence that counseling programs had on these learners' behavior and achievement (Brig man and Campbell 2003). The learners' achievement was established from Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test where students were evaluated in reading and mathematics scores. These scores were randomly sampled from secondary schools with corresponding ethnic and social economic backgrounds in the treatment group and checked for variance with students in a control group that was likened for achievement. Findings indicated that implementation of the counseling program resulted in ample gains. It was also noted that in the two subjects, students in the control group had lower mean scores than did their peers in the treatment group.

These findings are corroborated by Sink and Stroh (2003) who sort to establish the influence of counseling programs on elementary school learners from the State of Washington. 150 schools were randomly sampled and categorized into treatment and control group based on the comprehensiveness of counseling programs in each school. The study participants were assessed using criterion-referenced and standardized norm referenced test score data, derived from third and fourth level learners. Findings stipulated that early elementary learners who schooled in same school for a period of three and above years, where the said school had a comprehensive counseling program produced better grades than their counterparts.

The current study sought to establish whether the counseling programs in Kiambu County high schools influenced academic achievement.

## **Effectiveness of school counseling programs on Academic Achievement**

Academic satisfaction is one of the predictors of a successful life. Learners who perform academically are advantaged. Daulta, (2008) & Nuthanap (2007) found out that academic achievement is a significant aspect in establishing learners aptitude and abilities. The influence of counseling on student academic performance can only be understood after examining the relationship between counseling related interventions and students' academic performance.

According to Lens, & Deci, (2006) school counseling programs should be incorporated in the school program together with other school academic missions for instance academics. Winstead, (2004) concurs with Lens & Deci's opinion that learners who engage in the learning process and socialize with teachers and peers also focus on self-assuarance, strive to meet certain goals and are eager to learn. High performing schools are concerned with academic performance of their students and often assess their achievement.

Academic performance can be strengthened by school counseling programme (Bemak, 2000). Especially, therapists can contribute in making decisions and planning the curriculum in schools. They can build the academic aspect of the school and improve learners performance

by collaborating with other stake holders in schools in coming up with a standard curriculum for learners. Sink and Stroh (2003) studied the influence of a counseling programme on the performance of elementally learners in Washington. Findings indicated that schools that had a comprehensive counseling programme produced students whose performance was better in contrast to students who attended schools where comprehensive counseling programs were nonexistent. The current study not only identified and described the characteristics of counseling programs designed to intervene in student academic achievement, but also looked at the effectiveness of these programs in helping students to achieve academically.

According to Pajares, (2001) school counselors need to team up with classroom teachers in order to integrate both counseling programs and academic content standards, understand the coordination and pacing of lessons and familiarize themselves with content taught to the learners. This will make the counselors conversant with the academic needs of their clients therefore empower them to better intervene in case of students who need counselling interventions. According to Lens, & Deci, (2006), many high schools learning institutions give elaborate guidelines on when every academic content standard is offered to the students in the classrooms. This benefits not only students but also the school counselors. Moreover, getting in touch with the teacher involves school counselors as significant stake holders in accomplishing learning objectives and also strengthen the teacher- school counselor bond. These relationships between counselors and students emerged as a crucial aspect in the present study since it served as a basis of analysis on the influence that counseling has on individual student's academic performance.

Paisley & Hayes, (2003) asserts that counselors need to design interventions with the goal of coming up with instructional models that can be adopted in classrooms in addition to other experiential activities. Incorporating a school counseling program with learning indicates a direct influence on student performance, as well as closing the achievement gap. Closing the achievement gap programs enables the counselor to deal with performance needs of the students who are low academic achievers in addition to addressing other individual, psychosocial and emotional needs, which in turn enhances their academic achievement.

Further studies on the role and effectiveness of counseling on student academic achievement have been carried out in Africa. Olaleye, (2003) observed the impact of poor academic self-concept and its effect on student achievement in academic, social and personal domains. The study contends that self-concept is an aspect that is increasing being researched especially in education arena and evaluation research studies both as an outcome sought for its value and as a variable predictor in other relationships. Through counseling, students gain insights into their own abilities and potentials to improve their academic performance. Once they have developed a positive self-concept, they become more able to counter obstacles in academic performance. Further studies indicated there is a positive association between student's self-concept and academic performance (Olaleye, 2003). A study conducted in Ghana on influence of counseling on the academic achievement of learners found an ample improvement in the majority of learners after counseling was used to intervene in their academic performance (Renuka & Madhanika, 2013). This aspect formed the core variable of the current study.

In Kenya, there has been several studies done to establish the role that counseling plays in students' academic achievement. For instance, Amukoye (2008) did a study among adolescent students in Navakholo Division, Kakamega County that examined the effect of

counseling on these learners academic achievement. The study specifically examined the school counselors role and the issues brought to them by learners. Findings indicated that teacher counselors motivate students to work hard and focus on their academics. Arudo, (2008) confirmed this in his study on peer counseling and its influence on achievement. He suggested that some students performance had improved significantly after these learners underwent a forty minutes brief counseling session with the counselor. Research stipulates that counselors using this strategy are able to assist learners in time management, and formulate concrete, achievable goals with the learners at the beginning of therapy process (Hannish & Guerra, 2000). Though this study did not examine peer counselling sessions, it examined how individual counselling affects the academic performance of counselees. These issues became relevant as variables in the current study

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It states that people who are aware of the reasons for indulging in a particular mission are focused and inspired to sustain their efforts (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are three aspects of this theory: (a) intrinsic motivation, (b) extrinsic motivation, and (c) a motivation which are positioned along a Continuum of self-regulation. Intrinsic motivation describes a sense of self drive in an individual that enables them to pursue certain tasks for instance learning. These are the students who formulate education goals and strive to achieve them because they are self-motivated. In contrast, a motivation is a situation where learners have no motivation and lack self-drive to pursue or achieve academic goals. Extrinsic motivation lies between motivation on one end of the continuum and a motivation on the other. It is important to incorporate aspects of extrinsic academic motivation to the design of school counseling interventions. Counseling constitutes extrinsic motivation therefore the relevance of the self-determination theory. The objective of counseling is to empower the client to deal with problematic situations by developing the self-drive to seek solutions. This is most desired especially in dealing with academic performance. The concept of self-motivation as a consequence of school counseling and as the driver of student academic achievement was a significant factor in the analysis of findings in this study

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive research design which describes existing phenomenon and attitudes using observation and interpretation methods (Chandran, 2003). This design explored the influence of counselling programs on academic achievement of secondary school students in Limuru Sub County in Kiambu County. This was significant for the interpretation of the findings of the study. The study location was chosen because it is a peri-urban area with a blend of both urban and rural characteristics. This provided the study with a cross section of schools with a more representative character that contributed to the universality of the findings. The study participants included counselors, students and academic deans in public secondary schools in Limuru Sub County. A pre-study survey was done to identify the schools that had active counseling departments. Schools selected for the study were derived from the list that was obtained from Limuru Education Sub County Office. This Sub County has 28 secondary public schools. The researcher carried out a study in 30% of the schools in the Sub County which translated to 8 schools. This is consistent with recommendation by Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) who justified that at least 30% of the cases per group are required for research and this ensured that representative sample was obtained across the Sub County. These schools had to have a counseling program. Purposive sampling was used to identify students in each school who had received counseling services for a

period of two terms from the school counselors. The researcher chose a 10% random sample of this population which resulted to 10 students in each of the 8 schools and this translated to 80 respondents for the study. This is consistent with recommendations by Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) who justified the sample of 10% where the sample frame is large (and exceeding a minimum sample size of 30 respondents). This helped to elicit performance records before and after counseling.

In addition, data was collected using structured questionnaires and review of documents. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by the researcher for self-administration by the respondents. The study also used in-depth interview to collect data. The researcher individually interviewed counselors and students using leading questions designed as open ended that allowed the respondents to express themselves adequately. An audio-tape and field notes were used in recording the responses from the respondents. The views and feelings of the researcher were also recorded immediately after the interview. However, the researcher was free to add any prodding questions depending on the responsiveness of the respondent. Data was also collected from the students' performance records. These were student scores collected from three compulsory subjects which were Mathematics, English and Kiswahili. These acted as indicators of academic performance. For the purposes of validating the data collection instruments to evaluate reliability of the findings of this study, the research collection instruments were submitted to the supervisor for scrutiny before they were administered in the pilot study to assess reliability. The findings from the pilot study were analyzed based on the variables of the study and evaluated to establish their relevance to the study questions to assess validity. Since the study involved a sample that cannot be predetermined, the researcher carried out a pilot study to assess the availability of respondents and the reliability of the data collection tools. Piloting was administered in three schools in Kiambu County that were not part of the main study. The counselor used three counselors and three students from each school to make nine students.

### **Findings of the Study**

The objective of this study was to examine effectiveness of school counseling programs in academic achievement among secondary school learners in Kiambu County in Kenya. The researcher asked the teacher counselors questions on whether the school counseling programs were effective or not. The questions focused on whether they thought counseling goals were achieved and if counseling influenced academic achievement. All the teachers who participated in the study responded to the questions affirmatively leading to the conclusion that counseling in general and counseling for academic purposes achieved its goals, at least from the teachers' perspective.

All the teachers asked students they had counseled whether a change had occurred in their academic performance. Six teachers who kept records referred to those records and five of them enquired from the subject teachers if students were getting better grades after counseling. Counselors were certain from the methods they used that students they counseled had shown improvement in their performance. It was also important to establish whether students shared the same views with the teacher. Students were asked whether their interaction with the counselors fulfilled their counseling needs in school and whether those services caused an improvement in their academic performance. Findings indicated that 46 (65.7%) students felt that counseling services offered at school satisfied their needs and 52 (74.3%) students registered an improvement in their academic achievement as a result of those counseling services. Further the students were asked whether they felt more positive or

negative about school life after going through counseling. Results depicted that 61 (87%) of the students felt more positive about school life after counseling sessions and only 9 (13%) did not feel positive about school life after being counseled. This means that counseling offered was achieving its aims both in general and in academic performance. The study found out that 65.7% of students felt that counseling met their needs and 74.3% attained improvement in their academic performance following counseling. These findings concurs with those of Sink and Stroh (2003), Bemak, (2000) and Olaleye (2003) which established that comprehensive counseling programs helped in improving academic performance.

To determine whether students acquired particular skills as a result of academic counseling, the teachers were asked to agree or disagree with whether students they counseled had acquired the skills they came to learn from counseling. All the counselors noted that the students they had counseled learnt how to organize their work, be attentive in class and ask questions, improve their test taking skills and study habits and were more assertive. Six counselors reported that students had learnt how to make summary notes and had positive self-concept. Four counselors noted that their clients had developed skills they could use throughout their lives. Only two teachers noted that the clients had learnt how to improve their reading, writing and speaking skills. Students need skills in order to perform academically and as the teacher counselors reported, they were able to impact most of these skills in their students through counseling. Consequently students performed better academically after counseling.

### **Conclusions**

The study found that from the counselor's perspective, the goals of counseling were realized, in both academic and non-academic performance. Teachers were positive about counseling services. School counselors judged effectiveness of their services in meeting their goals by asking students about their grades, checking performance records and enquiring from subject teachers about the student's academic performance. Students taking part in the study corroborated teachers' opinion on the effectiveness of the counseling programs with 65.7% of them having the view that counseling services offered at school satisfied their needs and 74.3% reporting an improvement in their academic achievement as a result of those counseling services. Furthermore, 87% felt more positive about school life after attending counseling sessions.

When it came to acquiring particular academic skills through counseling, the counselors noted that the students they had counseled learnt skills like: organizing their work, listening and asking questions in class, test taking skills and studying efficiently, taking good notes, understanding and improved self-concept. Four counselors noted that their clients had developed skills they could use throughout their lives while two counselors noted that clients had learnt how to improve their reading, writing and speaking skills. Considering counselors' and student's concurring views, it is possible to conclude that counseling programs are effective in improving academic performance, findings that concurs with those of Sink and Stroh (2003), Bemak, (2000) and Olaleye (2003) which found that comprehensive counseling programs helps to improve academic performance.

### **Recommendations**

The counseling programs are commendable because they increase students' academic achievement. However, the study established that there is room for improvement. School counselors need to go through regular capacity building trainings so that they can be more

effective in their work. Regular supervision sessions may help the counselors to gain more counseling insights as well as enhancing self-care. Further research can be conducted to establish effectiveness of school counseling on students' psychosocial competences.

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