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**CHALLENGES COUNSELORS FACE IN EFFECTING SCHOOL
COUNSELING PROGRAMS FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KIAMBU COUNTY,
KENYA**

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Abstract:

School counseling is intended to help students overcome problems, which usually mitigate their academic performance in schools. Helping students adjust emotionally, physically, mentally, and socially enhances good academic performance. In achieving this goal of counseling especially in schools, the government has previously committed resources towards establishing counseling programs in schools. However, the reality on the ground is that there are few established counseling programs as well as few counselors to implement the said programs and this has posed a challenge to the counsellors in their effort to offer counseling to assist students to enhance their academic achievement. The aim of the study was to establish the challenges counselors face in affecting school counseling programs for academic achievement of secondary school students in Kiambu County. The objective of the study was to find out if counsellors faced challenges while offering to counsel for academic achievement. To achieve this objective the study used primary data collected from a sample of 80 secondary school-age going students from 8 schools, 8 counselors, and 8 academic deans of students from the sampled schools. The study was qualitatively done and self-determination theory was used to guide the study. Findings indicated that counselors encountered personal and professional challenges in the course of their counseling duties. For personal challenges, all counsellors (100%) reported having a difficult time balancing between teaching and counseling, all counselors (100%) noted they had insufficient time for counseling since little time was set aside in the school programs for counseling, (63%) said they had no specific rooms dedicated for counseling students, (63%) felt that the big number of students seeking counseling was a challenge while 100% stated dual relationship as a

tough challenge. In regard to professional challenges, (100%) of the counsellors stated that none was compensated for extra counseling duties, (75%) had insufficient skills in academic counseling, (50%) had little support from subject teachers and from parents, 100% indicated little support from school administrators, 100% cited increased workload, 100%, lack of formal recognition from Teachers Service Commission that employs teachers and 50% felt that counselors inclusivity in school discipline committee posed a challenge. The study concluded that school counseling programs are commendable because they increase students' academic achievement. However the study has established that school counselors should be equipped with appropriate counseling skills, their workload should be reduced and that school administration should encourage greater cooperation between teacher counselors and other members of staff as well as with parents and guardians, in order to make the counselors effort more productive. Further studies should be conducted to investigate how the school administration can be actively involved in supporting counseling programs in schools.

Keywords:

Counseling Programs, Academic Achievement, Counsellors Challenges, Secondary School Students

Introduction

School counseling is meant to help students deal with their problematic issues which normally have a negative impact on their academic performance. Once the students are helped to adjust emotionally and socially, discipline among students will improve which will further enhance academic performance (Wambui, 2015). This may be done creatively blending core academic content standards and school counseling standards. Students who have the opportunity to socially interact with the curriculum, fellow students and teachers and can make the connection between academics and personal interests and goals are more motivated to learn (Lens, & Deci, 2006). In order for the secondary school students to achieve these desired academic achievements, schools have put in place programs to guide the students and help them achieve all- round formation that is influential to academic success.

Counseling programs constitute a vital component of these programs that are established as interventions for student performance. According to the American School Counselor Association (2009), professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student academic performance.

A study by Olalaye (2003) in South Africa confirmed that there is a positive relationship between student's academic self-concept and performance. Olalaye's study examined the academic performance scores of a sample of students before and after counseling interventions by school counselors. The study found a significant improvement in the majority of students after counseling was initiated. This implied a positive influence of counseling on students' academic self-concept. The examination of student's scores before and after counseling formed a crucial part of the data to evaluate achievement in the present study.

On the continental scene, various studies have also been carried out to examine the role of counselors in student performance and academic achievement. For instance, Chireshe (2011)

studied the benefits of school counseling services in Zimbabwe secondary schools and their impact on academic achievement as perceived by students and school counselors. The study was part of a larger study on an assessment of the effectiveness of school counseling (SC) services in Zimbabwean secondary schools. The study found that both school counselors and students believed that the SC services resulted in personal-social, career and vocational benefits. Overall, both school counselors and students rated the Zimbabwean SC services fairly. School counselors and students concurred that the academic achievement of the students was borne, in part, from the counseling they received from school counselors in school.

In Kenya, there have been several studies conducted to investigate the role of counseling in students' academic achievement. For instance, Amukoye (2008) investigated the effect of counseling on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Navakholo Division, Kakamega District. The study specifically examined the role of the school counselor and the counseling issues they deal with. The study found that teacher counselors play a motivating role in the students by providing them with encouragement and focus to achieve academically. Arudo, (2008) confirmed this in his study on peer counseling and its influence on achievement. He suggested that single-session brief counseling, in which a student meets with a counselor for one session, lasting approximately 40 minutes, has been found effective in some instances of counseling on academic issues. Researchers found that counselors performing this method were often able to help students use their time more wisely, and form concrete, attainable goals with their students earlier in the counseling 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.

Researchers found that counselors using this method were often able to help students use their time more wisely, and form concrete, attainable goals with their students earlier in the counseling (Hannish & Guerra, 2000). This helps the students to do better academically because they are more focused and goal oriented. It is important to note that issues regarding counselling and academic performance in Kiambu have not been significantly studied to the best of the researcher's knowledge. Hence, the current study attempted to find out challenges faced by counselors in effecting school counselling programs for academic achievement of secondary school students in Kiambu County.

Literature Review

Challenges School Counselors Face in Effecting Counseling Programs for Academic Achievement of Secondary School Student

School counselors, particularly in Kenya, face some significant challenges in effecting counseling programs in school. Choge, Tanui, Ndegwa (2011) investigated these challenges in a study based on data from Nandi district of Kenya. They found several challenges that are common to school counselors. The schools had no reference materials or books in counseling. All the schools under study had not reserved sections in their school library for counseling materials or career literature for career counseling which students would refer to. This shows that students are not exposed to counseling materials and career literature apart from the face to face counseling that they receive from their school counselors. It is necessary to have counseling centers stocked with newspapers, magazines, books, films and other relevant materials that can help the students (Fan & Tan, 2010).

Halverson (2010) identified common ethical concerns about dual relationships between counsellors and students. Dual relationships can create conflicts of interests that compromise professional judgments' in counseling in a school setting. They cited a school teacher who provides counseling in his/her school. The teacher is also a member of disciplinary committee that handles student's misconducts. During the disciplinary committee meetings, the schools counselors breach confidentiality by giving students personal information to other members of the committee. The school counselor assumed three roles, counselor, teacher, and a disciplinarian. This makes the students not to trust the school counselor, hence the students may not fully utilize the counseling services.

Anagbogu (2013) proposed that schools counselors lacked skills and techniques to handle students' problems effectively. Similarly, (Mapfuma & Nkoma, 2013) stated that teacher counselors mandated to offer counselling services to students lack adequate training in counseling and therefore have inadequate skills to effectively counsel students. School counselors are overloaded with academic work(Mghweno, 2014) and other administrative duties like being class teachers so they had very little time left to counsel students and therefore they will not be effective in performance of their counseling services (Nyamwaka, 2013). This assertion is also supported by (Mushaandja, 2013).

Leung et al. (2003) noted that school administrators interfered with the counseling programs: if school principals wanted students information, the school counselors would provide the information to the principals as wanted and also reported that counseling case records were kept in locations within the school administrative offices where counseling teachers and other staff workers could view them hence there was no confidentiality on students information and as such students will have no faith in the counseling services. According to Nyaga (2013) some parents are uncooperative therefore becoming a barrier of counselling services. This assertion was supported by (Oyeet, 2012) who noted that parents tend to shun forums where family disputes that affect students academic achievement are discussed with teachers.

Other research studies stipulates that inadequacy of counselors in schools is a real challenge since the number of students seeking for counselling services are many(Nyamwanga,2013). Also, most school counselors wait until students emotional experiences have developed into problems before offering the counseling services to them, they mostly concentrate on the classroom work and forget the emotional problems experienced by the students. Owino & Odero (2014) emphasized the need to train school counselors to enable them use the skills to help students because without this skills a schools counselor cannot detect students' problems before they develop maladjustments which can be detrimental to their school grades.

According to Pines and Maslach (2010) school counselors stressful events in school combined with high unfulfilled expectations may produce a sense of overload that may lead a school counselor to feel that the job is excessively burdensome. School counselors may start to experience disappointment and frustration as emotional exhaustion sets in. They may also feel drained and with insufficient energy to make it through the next counseling session. Once emotional exhaustion sets in, the school counselor is unable to give aspects of the self to others that look up to the school counselor for help. At this stage the school counselor may cut back involvement with others by remaining emotionally detached and thus disengage from counseling tasks, (Pines and Maslach, 2010). The above literature review informed the current

study on challenges faced by counselors in effecting school counseling programs for academic achievement of secondary school students of counseling programs on academic achievement.

Study Methodology

Descriptive research design was used in the study Chandran (2004). This design explored the challenges encountered by counsellors in effecting school counselling programs for academic achievement of secondary school students in Kiambu County. This was significant for the interpretation of the findings of the study. This study was conducted in Limuru Sub County in Kiambu County. There are 28 public secondary schools in Limuru Sub County run and supervised by the government and government agents (KNEC 2012). The target population for this study were counselors, students and deans in secondary schools in Kiambu County. The study used purposive sampling to identify the schools to be used in the study. Pre-study survey was used to identify the schools that had active counseling departments. The researcher sampled 30% of the schools in the Sub County which resulted to 8 schools. This is in line with Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) who justified that at least 30% of the cases per group are required for research. These schools had a counseling program. Purposive sampling was used to identify students in each school that had undergone counseling sessions for a period of two terms from the school counselors. The researcher selected a 10% random sample of this population which elicited 10 students in each of the 8 schools and this added up to 80 participants for the study. This is consistent with recommendations by Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) who stated that a sample of 10% was adequate especially where the sample frame is big (and exceeding a minimum sample size of 30 respondents). Also, purposive sampling was used to sample 8 counselors from all the 8 schools that had been sampled for the study. This assisted in eliciting performance records before and after counseling.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study was collected from using structured questionnaires and review of documents. The questionnaire was served to the respondents by the researcher for self-administration by the respondents. The filled in questionnaires was collected after a week. The study also used in-depth interviews to collect data. The researcher individually interviewed counselors and students using leading questions designed as open ended so that they allowed for the respondents to express themselves completely. The responses were recorded, typically with audiotape and written notes (ie; field notes). The researcher also recorded her views and feelings immediately after the interview as well. 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 the three compulsory subjects including English, Kiswahili and Mathematics. These acted as indicators of academic performance.

Overview of Respondents (Counselors)

Response Rate

The study set out to interview and distribute questionnaires to 8 counselors and 80 students. Of this target sample, all the 8 counselors were interviewed and they responded to the questionnaire while 70 students were available for interview and responded to the questionnaire.

Respondents' Bio-data

The study questionnaire sought to identify the gender of the teacher counselors. According to the data, 6 respondents were female while 2 respondents were male as spelt out in the table below.

Table 1: Gender of The Counselors

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	2	25
Female	6	75

Counselors' Years of Service

The years of service of a counselor are vital in giving credibility to the responses the counselor gave to the questionnaire. It served to indicate knowledge of the subject matter that was the concern of this study. The respondents were asked to indicate the time, in years, which the counselor respondents had served as counselors. The findings in this regard are shown on table below.

Table 2: Counselors' years of experience

No. of Years	Frequency	Percentage
Below 5 years	0	0
5 - 7	2	25
8 - 10	2	25
Above 10 years	4	50

The table above shows that the majority of the respondents had been teaching for above 10 years with 50% of the counselor respondents belonging to this category. Twenty five percent had served for 8 to 10 years and for 5 to 7 years. This shows that those who had served beyond eight years constituted 75% of the respondents. This made them experienced enough to contribute authoritatively on the subject of the study. Furthermore, the researcher required the respondents to indicate their years of experience as counselors in their present stations. The findings in this regard are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Counselors' Years of Experience in Present Station

No. of Years	Frequency	Percentage
Below 5 years	0	0
5 - 7	6	75
8 - 10	2	25
Above 10 years	0	0

The table above shows that the majority of counselors had served as counselors in their stations for between 5 – 7 years. These constituted 75% of the counselor respondents while 25% had served for between 8 – 10 years. No respondents had served below 5 years and none had served above 10 years in their stations of work. Evident from this data was that the counselors had the requisite knowledge of the school and the counselling programs having worked for more than five years in the same station as counselors.

Lastly, the study sought to establish the professional qualifications of the respondents. The findings in this regard are presented in table below

Table 4: Professional Qualification of The Counselors

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma in counselling	5	62.5
Bachelor of education	2	25
Master of Counseling Psychology	1	12.5

Data in the table above shows that the majority of counselors had diploma in counselling as a professional qualification. This was cited by 62.5% of the respondents, while 25% had Bachelor of Education qualification. This group had not pursued any post qualification training in counselling except the knowledge they obtained from a unit taken as part of the syllabus for the award of a degree in education. Only one of the counselors had a master's degree in counseling psychology.

Study Findings

The objective of this study was to establish if counselors faced challenges while offering counseling for academic achievement. It is not uncommon for teachers doubling as counselors to face challenges in their dual roles (Choge, Tanui & Ndegwa 2011). The teacher counselors in the study were asked to note any personal or professional challenges they encountered in the course of their counseling duties. The personal challenges noted by the teachers are presented in table below

Table 5: Personal Challenges Counselors Face

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Balancing between teaching and counseling	8	100.0
Insufficient time to counsel students	8	100.0
Unavailability of dedicated counseling rooms	5	63.0
Large number of students in need of counseling	5	63.0
Dual relationship	8	100.0

According to table above 100% of the counselors had a difficult time balancing between their teaching workload and their responsibilities as counselors. Since teacher counselors taught and counseled at the same time, they faced the risk of overworking themselves and suffering emotional burnout. This was in line with a study by (Mghweno, 2014). In addition, 100% teachers noted that they had insufficient time for counseling since there was limited time

available to counsel students. This is because teacher counselors were serving both roles as teachers and educators and have little time to spare for counseling after fulfilling their teaching obligations. Further, 63% of the teachers had no dedicated counseling rooms a problem that Choge, Tanui and Ndegwa (2011) also found in their study. This makes scheduling of counseling difficult (Choge, Tanui and Ndegwa 2011) and can lead to breach of confidentiality if unauthorized persons access counseling records stored together with other documents (Leung *et al* 2003). In addition it can hinder students from accessing counseling services because of lack of privacy and stigma from other students The counselors stated that academic counseling would be more effective if sufficient time was set aside for counseling and if special rooms were provided for the purpose an assertion that (Mushaandja,2013) concurs with. Further 63% felt that the big number of students seeking counseling was a challenge to them and it resulted to burnout for counselors. 100 % of the counselors sighted dual relationship as a big problem in that they are teaching the same students and counseling some of them at the same and this dual relationship raises ethical questions as had been suggested by (Halverson, 2010). This therefore forces teachers to work extra hard and results to overwhelming of counselors as depicted in the current study and previous study (Wambui, 2015)

The next table contains professional challenges counseling teachers faced

Table 6: Professional Challenges Counselors Face

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
No compensation of extra work	8	100.0
No training (skills) in career and academic training	6	75.0
Little support from subject teachers	4	50.0
Little support from parents	4	50.0
Little support from school administrators	8	100.0
Increased workload (teaching/counseling)	8	100.0
Lack of formal recognition by Employer (TSC)	8	100.0
Counselors as part of discipline committee	4	50.0

As shown in the table above, 100% of the counselors stated that none was compensated for the extra work they did of counseling students as well as teaching their various subjects. In addition, some counselors were concerned about their inadequacy counseling skills particularly in issues related to academics and careers. 75% of the counselors noted that they had insufficient skill in career and academic counseling.

Some of those counselors that had a diploma stated that career unit taught in college was shallow while those with degree stated that in Universities more emphasis was put on general psychology in the units they pursued. 50% of the counselors stated they got little support by subject teachers and another 50% decried little support from parents of the students they counseled. This view was in line with that of (Nyaga, 2013) suggestion that uncooperative parents are a hindrance of both counselors and the counselling program in schools. It was noted that the parents were not called to schools by school administrators when counselors needed them because to them it was like time wastage. On the other hand, some of the parents failed to turn up after they have been invited to school by counselors to discuss with them problematic issues that affect their students' academic achievement. 100% of the counselors felt that the administration did not fully support the counselling teacher and the counseling program. All

counselors in the study recommended that cooperation from other staff members, and parents and full support by their respective school administrations would make academic counseling more effective. This aspect of uncooperative parents had been identified in earlier studies as a hindrance to counselors and the counseling program (Nyaga, 2013). Further 100% of the counselors' workload is not reduced. They have a similar workload with the rest of the teachers yet they are expected to counsel students too. Moreover, 100% of counselors claimed that TSC does not recognize the effort the school counselors put in enhancing academic achievement of students in secondary schools. They are neither promoted nor enumerated and this makes the counselors feel demoralized. 50 % of the counselors stated that they are members of the discipline committee in the schools and these has made some students believe that counselors betray them when they have indiscipline cases. This makes the students lose trust with counselors and fail to be responsive to counselling which in turn affect their academic achievement.

Conclusion

The study investigated challenges faced by counselors in effecting school counseling programs for academic achievement of secondary school students in Kiambu County. The study has found that counseling programs in all eight schools were comprehensive in that they addressed both academic and nonacademic issues such as personal and social issues facing students. The study found that academic issues dominate counseling sessions and that students going for counseling show high levels of motivation to excel, going by skills they want to learn through counseling. Counseling programs have been found to be collaborative although counselor teachers felt that more cooperation was necessary. Academic counseling has been found to boost academic performance in all the schools sampled. Both counselor teachers and students in the study reported that individuals undergoing counseling learned important academic skills that are vital for good performance. Students were found to be responsive to counseling and teachers reported that a significant proportion of clients were self-referred and that the number of students going for counseling was increasing significantly.

Finally, the study has found that counseling programs face certain challenges including counselors having to serve dual roles as teachers and counselors, insufficient facilities and less than satisfactory cooperation by parents and teachers.

Recommendations

The counseling programs are commendable because they increase students' academic achievement. However, the study has established that there is room for improvement. To start with, it would be beneficial to introduce assessment and screening into these programs. This will enable counselors identify students who might benefit from counseling and enable them keep track of students' progress. Secondly, teacher counselors' workload should be addressed. Their teaching workload can be reduced or more teachers can be trained as counselors. Better still, schools can have teachers whose exclusive duty is counseling. Schools should also provide more facilities in form of counseling rooms to ensure confidentiality. Thirdly, teacher counselors should receive more training in academic counseling so that they can provide better services. Books, magazines, audiovisual resources and other useful material should be available to the counselors. Finally, school heads should encourage greater cooperation between the counselor teachers, other members of staff as well as with parents and guardians. It is also important for TSC to offer remuneration to teacher counselors. This will make teachers

implement school counselling programs with less impediments therefore enhancing the students' academic achievement through counseling.

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