

Factors Considered in the Appointment of Guidance and Counselling Personnel in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at establishing the factors considered in the appointment of guidance and counselling personnel in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya, and assessing the training level of teacher counsellors in secondary schools. The study was conducted using the descriptive survey research design, with a sample that comprised of 15 school principals and 15 teacher counsellors who were selected using stratified random sampling. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect research data. The study established that the factors that were given importance were ability to handle confidential matters, devotion to duty, professional experience as a teacher, ability to interact with students, and age with a preference for elderly teachers. After appointment, teacher counsellors were sponsored by their schools for seminars and workshops. The study concludes that Kenyan secondary school principals do not put emphasis on training when appointing teacher counsellors.

Keywords: Guidance and counselling; Appointment of teacher-counsellors, Teacher-counsellor training

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning is not something solely associated with childhood or with school; learning happens everywhere and hence the term lifelong learning (Claxton & Lucas, 2009). School education is just the start of preparation for lifelong learning (Cheng, 2001). Because learning takes place not only in school but also in the multiple contexts and valued practices of everyday lives across the life span (Banks, Au, Ball, *et al.*, 2007), schools should strive to equip learners with the necessary skills to take full advantage of the lifelong learning opportunities provided by society. The student is at the centre of the educational process, and therefore all activities in the school should aim at developing his or her total personality to the fullest (Othman, Pislaru & Impes, 2013). Guidance and counselling programmes in schools are geared towards promotion of the development of students.

In Kenya, the purpose of guidance and counselling programme as stipulated in the Ministry of Education Handbook on Guidance and Counselling (Republic of Kenya, 2007) is to help the student meet a great variety of needs ranging from psychological and sociological to academic adjustment. For guidance and counselling programs to meet such roles successfully, it is important that guidance and counselling personnel are effectively selected. Factors like qualifications and other personal characteristics need to be put into consideration when appointing guidance and counselling teachers.

In developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) and Britain, schools are required to have professional counsellors, who should have had sound training and are

qualified in stringent theoretical principles, high level practice skills and other specialized areas of counselling, for example art therapy and play therapy (American Counseling Association, 2005; British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2001). In contrast, many schools in African countries do not have qualified Counsellors ((Aluede, 2004; Egbochuku, 2008).

In Kenya, the only qualification to be a teacher counsellor is to be a secondary school teacher, without any formal training in counselling or educational psychology (Mwaniki, 2008). School principals are left to appoint the guidance and counselling personnel among the teachers in their schools. For all other subjects taught in secondary schools, there are subject specialists, but guidance and counselling is assigned to any teacher whom the principal finds suitable to handle it. At present, the Ministry of Education lacks in providing guidelines on the criteria that headteachers should use in appointing the teacher counsellors. It is this gap in provision of guidance and counselling, which is an important component in education, which the current study sought to address. Effective guidance and counselling programme in schools enhances discipline among the students and could eventually lead to improved academic performance.

1.1. Statement of the research problem

While teachers and school administrators recognize the important role played by guidance and counselling in student management, it has been observed that guidance and counselling in most of our schools is not effective (Republic of Kenya, 1999). This can be seen to translate in the many cases of indiscipline being reported in Kenyan secondary schools

(Kiprop & Chepkilot, 2011). In Kenyan schools, strikes are some of the common forms of indiscipline. The consequences of such behaviour include incidences of rape, violence, disobedience to school authority, drug addiction and damage of school property (Republic of Kenya, 2001; Gitome, Katola & Nyabwari, 2013). There is therefore need for guidance and counselling to be strengthened. One way of doing this is by making sure that teachers who are appointed to the position of teacher counsellors have the necessary qualifications for guidance counselling. It is however not clear the factors that are considered in appointment of guidance and counselling personnel in secondary schools in Kenya. This study therefore endeavoured to establish the criteria used by school principals to identify guidance and counselling personnel in Kenya.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of the study was to find out the factors considered in the appointment of guidance and counselling personnel in public secondary schools in Kenya. Specifically the study sought to establish the criteria used in the appointment of guidance and counselling teachers in public schools; and assess the training level of teacher counsellors in secondary schools.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The government of Kenya's initiative to establish formal guidance and counselling in Kenyan education system dates back to immediately after independence in 1963. The following year saw the formation of a commission to review the education system. Kenya Education Commission on Education Report (Republic of Kenya, 1964) recommended, among other things, that the schools should provide some guidance to students. Since then, successive government commission reports and educational policy documents have called for establishment and strengthening of guidance and counselling in schools (Republic of Kenya, 1976; 1988; 1999; 2001).

Guidance and counselling in Kenyan schools aims at helping all learners to grow in self-understanding and develop capabilities for making realistic career decisions, overcome personality deficits and make optimal academic progress (Kilonzo, 1980). The extent to which this will be achieved in our schools depends on a number of factors, some which concern the way teacher counsellors are appointed. The major concern of this study is to determine the factors considered in appointment of guidance and counselling personnel.

There are a number of factors that ought to be considered when appointing guidance and counselling personnel. A study carried out by American School Counselor Association on different subgroups (see Herman, 1997) indicated that, a school counsellor should have personal competences in self-acceptance and interpersonal working relationship. This is true according to the researcher because teacher counsellors interact with other people including students, school administrators and other teachers, and their interpersonal working relationships will highly determine their success. The school counsellors in

America are required by most public school systems to have undertaken advanced-degree coursework in the following topics: human growth and development, counselling theory, individual counselling, group counselling, social and cultural foundations, testing/appraisal, research and program evaluation, professional orientation, career development, supervised practicum, and supervised internship (American Counseling Association, 2005).

In England and Wales, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2001) says that counsellors should have had sound training and that it is imperative that counsellors are qualified in stringent theoretical principles, high level practice skills and other specialized areas of counselling, for example art therapy and play therapy. They should also have obtained or be aiming for BACP Accreditation and United Kingdom Register of Counsellors (UKRC) Registration or equivalent. The BACP (2001) also mentions diploma and degree courses as alternative requirements for one to qualify to become a school counsellor in England and Wales. Moreover, schools are expected to ensure that an adequate number of training hours should have been completed as part of training and refer to their own requirement for 450 hours teaching time, making a distinction between these and short courses in counselling skills. BACP (2001) also recommends that 100 hours of supervised counselling practice should have been completed, preferably with children or young people. School counselling trainees in England are expected to be recruited only to well-established services and only then if the person is working towards completion of their qualification. Accreditation is supervised by experienced and salaried counsellors, and client contact time is limited to a few hours a week.

In African countries the situation is different from the ones given in the foregoing. In Nigeria for example, Egbochuku (2008) established that most secondary schools do not have qualified Counsellors. Egbochuku's study also revealed that there is a significant relationship between qualification of guidance and counselling personnel and the quality of guidance services rendered to secondary school students. Schools with qualified guidance and counselling personnel benefited more from the varieties of guidance services rendered by these personnel. He concluded that counsellors must have a fairly high level of psychological sophistication in their profession education in order to meet the different expectations of their students. Furthermore, school guidance and counsellors in Nigeria are not required to be certified by the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) which is the umbrella all Counsellors ought to statutorily belong (Aluede, 2004).

In Kenya, Ndambuki and Mutie (1999) noted that any person in a school setting as long as he or she is interested in helping the students can be appointed to the position of school counsellor. This is a defective view because counselling just like any other profession requires theories and practical skills to carry it out effectively. Ndambuki & Mutie (1999) state that in preparing for counselling it is important to acquire

knowledge of theories of personality and psychotherapy and also diagnostic and behavioural intervention techniques as well as dynamics of human behaviour. The implication is that each counsellor must be willing to continually struggle to live up to his or her own full potential. According to 1979-1983 Development Plan guidance and counselling was to be made part of the teacher training curriculum at the college and University levels. This recommendation though implemented then, the guidance and counselling course seems not to have been effectively tackled and it just dwelt with one course – introduction to guidance and counselling. This leaves teachers deficient on many areas in counselling. The teachers find themselves incapacitated to offer required help.

Research carried out by Nthusi (1999) on selection of teacher counsellors in secondary schools revealed that the teacher counsellor in Kenya today is at times nominated by the head, voted by the staff members or appointed by the TSC to head the department. The latter is assumed to be a department just like any other. There is no consideration of whether the teacher possesses appropriate skills and knowledge in guidance and counselling. This becomes an appointment just like any other subject in the school. Only a few schools recognize the office of guidance to offer counselling services to students. Nthusi (1999) argued that such teachers have proved ineffective because they do not in the first place understand their role in guidance and counselling.

Another Kenyan study by Mwaniki (2008) established that teacher-counsellors faced a number of problems, including lack of adequate time for counselling, heavy teaching workload, lack of resources for counselling, lack of adequate support from principals/ teachers, lack of adequate training, and poor support from parents/community. This shows that there exist problems in appointment of guidance and counselling personnel in Kenyan schools. It therefore emerges that in the Kenyan school setting, the school counsellor is generally a teacher appointed from among the staff within the school establishment.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out using the descriptive survey research design. Survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2003). It includes cross-sectional and longitudinal studies using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection, with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population (Babbie, 1990). By using this design, the researcher did not manipulate the variables of interest, but only studied them as they naturally occur. The study was conducted in Kiambu County, focusing on the public secondary schools in the County. The study sample comprised of 15 school principals and 15 teacher counsellors who were selected using stratified random sampling. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect research data from the principals and teacher counsellors.

After all the data was collected, data cleaning was done in order to determine inaccurate, incomplete, or unreasonable data and then improve the quality through correction of detected errors and omissions. After data cleaning, the data was coded and entered in the computer for analysis using both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and percentages. Qualitative data was analysed qualitatively using content analysis based on analysis of meanings and implications emanating from respondent information and comparing responses to documented data.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted among 15 principals and 15 teacher counsellors. The respondents (both principals and teacher counsellors) had served in their schools for at least three years. The school principals indicated that they considered a number of factors when appointing guidance and counselling personnel in their schools (Table 1). All the principals (100.0%) considered those teachers who could handle confidential matters when appointing guidance and counselling personnel. The other factors that were considered included devotion to duty (93.3%), professional experience as a teacher (80.0%), ability to interact with students (66.7%), and age with a preference for elderly teachers (53.3%). It is noteworthy that all principals considered confidentiality, which is a key issue when it comes to guidance and counselling.

Table 1
Factors considered in appointing guidance and counselling personnel

Factors considered	No. of principals	Percentage
One who can handle confidential matters	15	100.0
Devotion to duty	14	93.3
Professional experience as a teacher	12	80.0
Ability to interact with students	10	66.7
Age with preference to elderly teachers	8	53.3

The principals reported that, other than teacher counsellors, their schools involved other people in guidance and counselling. These included other teachers (86.7%), deputy principal (66.7%) the principal (60.0%), motivational speakers from the community (40.0%) and Church leaders among others. It therefore emerges that counselling was mainly the responsibility of teachers, although some schools invited motivational speakers besides involving church leaders and pastors.

The study sought to find out how teacher counsellors were appointed. As it turned out, majority of the teacher counsellors (86.7%) reported that they were appointed by the principal and

then confirmed by the Teachers Service Commission. Two teacher counsellors (13.3%) were requested by the Heads of department to join guidance and counselling. One significant finding is that none of the principals or teacher counsellors indicated that training in guidance and counselling was a factor considered in appointment to the department. This is in contrast to the guidelines in developed countries, for example in England and Wales, where BACP (2001) notes that counsellors should have had sound training and that it is imperative that counsellors are qualified in stringent theoretical principles, high level practice skills and other specialized areas of counselling, for example art therapy and play therapy.

According to the teacher counsellors in the study, most of the factors that were important to consider in appointing guidance and counselling teachers (Table 2) were making sure the teachers were qualified for the job, that they were interested in counselling, availability and experience in counselling. There are also other characteristics that should be given attention when appointing counsellors. According to Durantini, Dolores, Mitchell, Earl, and Gillette (2006), intervening to stimulate cognitive and behavioural changes in a societal group supposes a social relationship in which a communicator must gain the trust of and effectively promote the advocated changes in the audience. To this end, characteristics of the agent of change such as competence and similarity to the targets are likely to be critical. As the idea of social relationship suggests, however, the degree to which an audience develops trust and engages in consequent change is not only a function of the independent features of the interventionist. Instead, an intervention source may be effective for some audiences but ineffective for others, complicating empirical predictions as well as the selection of influential communicators (Durantini et al., 2006). The same can be said of teacher counsellors whose attitudes, norms, cultural and value judgments must fit the expectation of students if they are to be consulted. Factors like gender, age, and religious affiliation of teachers should be considered with a view of striking a balance where a school has students from multi-ethnic backgrounds.

Table 2

Factors that should be considered when appointing teacher counsellors

Factors considered	No. of teacher counsellors	Percentage
Qualifications	12	80.0
Interest	11	73.3
Availability	9	60.0
Experience	8	53.3
Gender sensitivity	6	40.0
Personal relations with other team members and students	5	33.3
Commitment	5	33.3
Good morals	4	26.7
Integrity	3	20.0

The study established that 11 (73.3%) of the teacher counsellors had Bachelor of Education qualifications, while 3 (20.0%) had Diplomas in education. Only one (6.7%) of the teacher counsellors had a professional course in psychological counselling. We sought to find out what kind of preparation is given to teacher counsellors after appointment, considering that training in guidance and counselling was not a requirement for appointment. As it turned out (see Table 3), after appointment, majority (80.0%) of the teacher counsellors were prepared for their new responsibilities through attendance of seminars and workshops. Other teachers (33.3%) were only given a book on guidance and counselling to read or informed by the head of guidance and counselling on the expectations in the new role. This shows that in most secondary schools incompetent teachers are given the responsibility to offer guidance and counselling. Even the workshops and seminars were noted to be very short and did not fully equip teachers with skills for counselling. Since the only qualification to be a teacher counsellor in Kenya is to be a secondary school teacher, without any formal training in counselling or educational psychology (Mwaniki, 2008), after appointment the counsellors should receive adequate training to fit in their new roles.

Table 3

Types of preparation of teacher counsellors after appointment

Preparation methods	No. of teacher counsellors	Percentage
Sponsored for seminars and workshops	12	80.0
Given a guidance and counselling book to read	5	33.3
Informed by HoD on what to do and given expectations	2	13.3
None	1	6.7

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main goal of this study was to find out the factors considered in the appointment of guidance and counselling personnel in public secondary schools in Kenya. Guidance and counselling plays a significant role in schools as it enhances student discipline by promoting dialogue, enhances student performance, offers career choice guidance and also guides on social problems (Kasomo, 2011). The success of school guidance and counselling is however hinged on how effectively school counsellors are appointed. In Kenya, there is no legal requirement that those appointed to the position of guidance and counselling should possess prior training in counselling. As evidenced in this study, school principals did not place emphasis on training in guidance and counselling as a prerequisite for appointment. The factors that were given importance were ability to handle confidential matters, devotion to duty, professional experience as a teacher, ability to interact with students, and age with a preference for elderly teachers. The study showed that after appointment, teacher counsellors were sponsored by their schools for seminars and

workshops while others were given a guidance and counselling book to read. For others, support came only in the form of the head of department informing them on what is expected on them. The study shows that in Kenya school guidance and counselling is yet to become a profession. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education should consider professionalizing school guidance and counselling, whereby those appointed are to have received at least a degree in counselling psychology. The teacher counsellors who are already practicing in schools should be sponsored for training in counselling-related fields, as seminars and workshops cannot equip teachers with all the skills needed for effective counselling. Further research is needed to understand the training needs of school counsellors in Kenya.

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