

Assessment of the Provisions of Guidance and Counseling Services in Secondary Schools of East Harerge Zone and Hareri Region, Ethiopia

Yirgalem Alemu

Lecturer, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences,

Haramaya University, Ethiopia

Email: sasishaa@yahoo.com.au

Telephone: (251) 911 91 01 94

Abstract

The aim of the study was to assess the provision and perceived importance of guidance and counseling. The study used survey design and 336 participants participated in the study. Chi-square, independent sample t-test, Kruskal-Wallis test and percentages were used as data analysis techniques. The result indicated that the school community had poor awareness about the presence of G&C services at their schools. Male students' utilization of the services was significantly higher than their female counter parts. Fear of asking help was the reason for underutilization of the G&C services by female students. The schools guidance and counseling programs did not have written plans, specific roles and responsibilities and private counseling rooms. There was loose coordination among principals, teachers, and guidance and counseling programs. Recommendations on ways of improving G&C services were forwarded.

Keywords

Guidance and counseling, Secondary schools, Gender, Private counseling room, Roles and responsibilities, Hareri

Introduction

The rationale to offer guidance and counseling services to high school students is clear. The high school years is a periods of academic, social, personal, emotional and intellectual growth for most adolescents. By resolving physical, emotional, social and academic difficulties of the students and by helping students understand their learning strengths and weaknesses; their academic achievement can be improved and their overall development can be enhanced. On top of this, the increasing complexities in the society, industrial and technological development, changes of the nation's educational system and increasing number of students necessitated the provision of effective guidance and counseling service

more than any other time. Thus, supporting adolescents in all aspects of their development is very critical to their success. School systems must be ready, willing and able to deal with challenges that adolescents face in going through the transitions (Haregewoin & Yusuf, 1994; Oladele, 1987).

Bhatnagar and Gupta (1999) define guidance as a process of helping the individual find solutions to his/her own problems and accept them as his own. Ipaye (1983) stated that guidance is a general label, an umbrella term that covers all the means whereby an institution identifies and responds to the individual needs of pupils/students and thereby helping the individual to develop his or her maximum potential. Counseling, on the other hand, is a subset of the general term we call guidance services.

The purposes of guidance and counseling (G&C) programs for school children are many folds. Empirical evidences showed that G&C programs had significant influence on improving discipline problems (Baker & Gerler, 2001), enhancing students grades (Gerler, Kinney & Anderson, 1985), strengthening social skills (Verduyn, Lord & Forrest, 1990), helping students make wise decision on career development and college choices (Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998) and developing positive study habits and study skills (Abid Hussain, 2006). The Ethiopian government designed 70:30 strategies of higher education intake ratios in favor of science & technology. Accordingly, science and mathematics (S&M) secondary education is put to the spotlight (Federal Ministry of Education, 2010). It is the writers believe that guidance and counseling play significant role in the implementation of this strategy.

In the history of Ethiopian higher education, the term "counseling" appeared for the first time in 1967 when a course called "Guidance and Counseling" was introduced in the curriculum of Addis Ababa University (Yusuf, 1982). Since then; the course has been given to university students at the department of Psychology. Graduates have been assigned to schools and other social settings to provide guidance and counseling services.

The present study tried to assess the provision and perceived importance of G&C services in secondary schools of Hareri region and East Harerge zone of Oromia region. To achieve this, the researcher examined the availability of G&C programs, the qualification of personnel providing G&C services, availability of materials and facilities for the successful execution of the program and the level of students' and teachers utilization of services.

Statement of the Problem

According to Haregewoin and Yusuf (1994), the people in the traditional helping professions (religious people, elders, or parents) do not have any scientific training. Hence, their help is insignificant to the present day adolescents. Oladele (1987) also argues that counselors must have a fairly high level of psychological sophistication in their profession in order to meet the different expectations of their clients. According to him the quality of counseling services rendered depends a great deal on the training of the counselors.

Considering these facts, G&C personnel are being trained in Ethiopian tertiary institutions and sent to schools to deliver services. Although considerable resources are expended to train these professionals, no data have been collected to describe their programs and

activities. There is a need, therefore, to assess the G&C services rendered by school guidance and counselors.

Research objectives

The main objectives of the research is to assess the provision and perceived importance G&C programs at secondary schools of Hareri region and East Harerge zone of Oromia region. To address the objectives, the following research questions are forwarded:

Are students and teachers aware of the presence of G&C program at their schools?

Is there gender difference in the utilization of G&C services?

How do students, teachers, school principals and education bureau officials perceive the importance of G&C programs to high school students?

Is there any attempt made to assess the effectiveness of the guidance and counseling services provided at the schools?

Method

Survey research design was used for this study. First the regional and zonal education bureau officials were communicated if there were schools that had functioning G&C programs. The officials reported that all government high schools in Hareri people regional state (five in number) and 13 out of the 30 government high schools in East Harerge zone had G&C programs. Since the purpose of the study was to assess the provisions of G&C services, only those schools that had functioning G&C programs were assessed. Accordingly, half of the schools that were reported to have G&C programs (3 schools from Hareri region and 6 schools from East Harerge zone) were randomly selected using lottery method. From these schools a total of 336 participants (225 students, 90 teachers, 9 directors, 9 school guidance and counselors, one regional education bureau head, one zonal education bureau head and one supervisor) participated in the study.

Instrument

The instruments that were used for collecting data were questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The questionnaire had open-ended and closed-ended items. It was designed to collect relevant information from teachers and students. Semi-structured interview was employed to collect data from principals, school counselors and regional and zonal education bureau officials. The validity of the instruments was established by colleagues and lecturers of College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Haramaya University. The reliability of the questionnaire had Cronbach's alpha of .89. The data were collected with the help of school principals and teachers.

Data Analysis

Chi-square, independent sample t-test, Kruskal-Wallis test and percentages were used to analyze quantitative data obtained through questionnaire. A thematic analysis (Qualitative analysis) was used to analyze interviews and open ended questionnaire results. This

involves a critical assessment of each response and examining it using thematic interpretation in accordance with the objective of the study.

Results

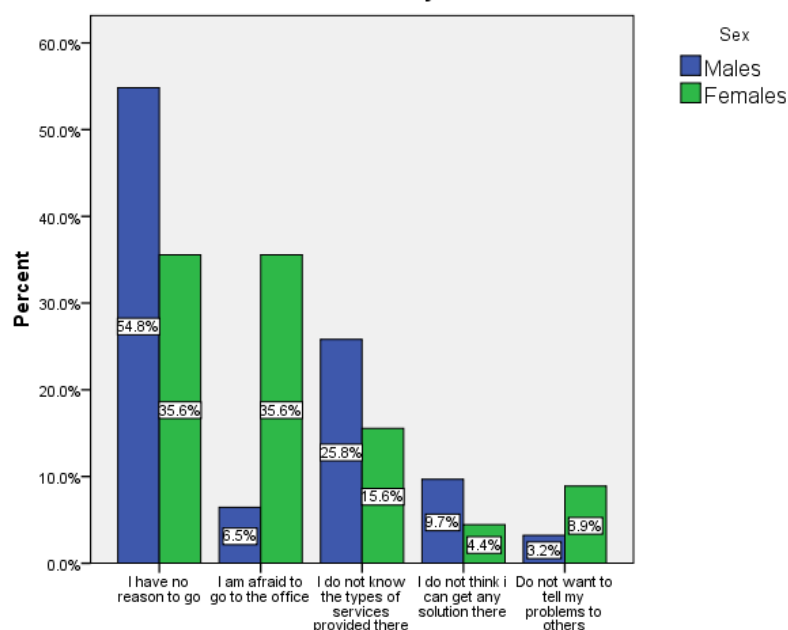
All questionnaires that were distributed to the teachers were correctly filled and returned. However, only 184 out of 225 students correctly filled and returned the questionnaires. The remaining questionnaires were not returned or incorrectly filled. All the analysis was based on the information obtained from 184 students, 90 teachers, nine school principals, seven school guidance and counselors, one regional education bureau head, one zonal education bureau head and one supervisor.

The first objective of this study was to investigate the level of awareness of teachers and students about the existence of G&C programs in their respective schools. The results of the study indicated that 50.8% of students and 33.7 % of teachers expressed that there was G&C programs at their school. Among the participants who were aware of the presence of G&C programs, only 20 % of the students sought help and none of the teachers neither sought help nor referred students to the school guidance and counselor.

In fact, there seems to be sex difference in the awareness and utilization of students in the G&C program. About 47 % of male and 54.7 % of female students were aware of the presence of G&C services at their school. However, more male students (27.9%) visited the guidance and counseling office than their female counter parts (13.5%). The Chi-square test revealed that there were significant gender differences in the utilization of G&C services $X^2(1)=4.36, P<.05$.

The students who had never utilized the school guidance and counseling services were asked about the reasons for not using. The results are provided in the following graph.

Figure 1: Students Reasons for not Visiting the School Guidance and Counseling office by Sex



As it can be seen from the above figure, most students believed that there was no reason to go to the school guidance and counselor's office. When the responses were analyzed by gender, 35.6% of female students claimed that they were afraid to go to the office for help compared to only 6.5 % of their male counter parts.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare perceived importance of G&C programs for high school students. The result showed that there was significant difference in score for students ($M=21.83, SD=5.8$) and teachers ($M=26.64, SD=3.6; t(258) = -8.35, p=.000$). The magnitude of the difference was found to be large (0.21). That is, 21% of the variance in perceived importance of G&C programs was explained by being student or teacher. Further, Kruskal-Wallis test results indicated that perceived importance of guidance and counseling were significantly affected by teachers service years ($H(3)=13.91, P<.05$), but it is not affected by stream or departments of teachers ($H(1)= 1.79, P<.05$). However, independent sample t-test indicated that there was no significant difference in the score for male students ($M=23.57, SD=6.01$) and female students ($M=23.28, SD=5.03; t(269) =.419, p=.144$). All participants perceived that improving study skills was the most expected function of school guidance and counseling program ($M=4.10$ out of the possible 5 points). Unfortunately, the vocational and career decision role of guidance and counseling was given the least attention by all participants.

Availability of certified or trained service providers, proportionality of service providers and service takers, availability of clear job descriptions and written plans including resources are pertinent to the effective implementation of the G&C programs. These issues were addressed using the interview schedule designed for regional and zonal education bureau officials, school principals and guidance and counseling officers of the study area. All interviewee except one pointed out that there were neither clear job descriptions nor written plans attached to the school guidance and counseling office. Almost all of the schools (except one) had one guidance and counseling officer. Some of these practitioners had training in Psychology, School counseling or sociology whereas others did not have any forms of training in guidance and counseling. Most school guidance and counselors reported that they did not have private counseling room. The school principals also confirmed that they had serious shortage of offices and they were forced to share offices among staff. Most school principals and other officials wanted the G&C program to focus on education related issues like study skill, discipline and late coming. With the absence of clear roles and responsibilities of G&C programs, most visited guidance and counselors were expected to serve as unit leaders. All principals and all education bureau officials of Hareri region and East Harerge zone agreed that they had never assessed the effectiveness of the guidance and counseling programs at their respective schools.

Discussion

The result of the study indicated that about half of the students and one-third of the teachers were aware of the existence of G&C programs at their schools. Out of these, less than a quarter of students utilized the services. One school counselor reported that in a school that enrolled more than 1000 students, only 38 students sought help from him for the last six months. Sex difference had been observed in awareness about the program and utilization

of the services. Though more female students knew the existence of G&C program compared to their male counterparts, their utilization was significantly lower than that of male students. Most female students mentioned fear for not utilizing the guidance and counseling office.

The present result is similar to the studies of Neal's (1983) and Unger and Crawford (1992) that females were comparatively more aware of counseling services. However, unlike Unger and Crawford (1992) and Neal's (1983) findings, females were not proportionately greater users of counseling services. Women's increased awareness of counseling services may not be surprising as they have a statistically significant increased risk of having mental distress than men (Kebede, Alem, & Rashid, 1999). However, it is surprising that they did not consume the services as indicated in the present study. Female participants mentioned fear as principal reason for not utilizing the counseling services. This might emanate from the culture and the way females are socialized in general and absence of female counselors in particular. Many guidance and counselors in the surveyed schools were males. In most Ethiopian culture, females are not allowed to approach males privately. That is why many female students mentioned fear as a reason for not utilizing the services. Hence, it is advisable for schools to respond female students counseling needs by employing female professionals.

The importance of G&C programs for school students was agreed by all participants. There was no significant difference between males and females in this regard. However, teachers' score of perceived importance of G&C services was significantly higher than that of students. Furthermore, experienced teachers perceived importance score of guidance and counseling was significantly higher than less experienced teachers. It is true that experienced teachers have lots of experiences about their students' strengths and weaknesses and they value the role of school G&C programs in capitalizing strengths and eradicating weaknesses. Though the teachers agreed on the importance of G&C programs, none of them referred any student to the G&C office.

Students and teachers expressed improving study skills and fostering healthy heterosexual relationship to be the most important functions of school G&C programs. On the other hand, principals and regional and zonal education bureau officials stressed disciplinary issues to be the center of G&C programs. This study is similar to the studies conducted by Baker and Gerler (2001) and Abid Hussain (2006) that school G&C program had significant influence on improving discipline problems and fostering positive study habit and study skill. However, unlike studies by Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, (1998), career and college choices were given the least credit by all participants. According to the Ethiopian Education and Training policy (1994), the purpose of general secondary education is to enable students identify their interests for further education and for specific training. This purpose will be achieved if school guidance and counselors analyze potentials and interests of students and provide career information in a way of preparing students for the world of work.

One of the strengths of G&C program in the study areas was availability of trained counselors. Most visited school counselors had training related to guidance and counseling. This is in line with what Oladele (1987) observed. According to him the quality of counseling services rendered depends a great deal on the training of the counselors.

However, there was serious problem related to number of counselors per school and their roles and responsibilities. All surveyed schools had one counselor which was not proportional to the number of students. The American School Counselors Association (ASCA, 2007) suggests an ideal proportion of 1:100 or a maximal proportion of 1:300. Nevertheless, in the present study the counselor-student proportion was about 1:1000. Other than the number, the school guidance and counseling program was dominated by male professionals. This poor proportion and poor gender balance impacted the school guidance and counseling programs negatively.

According to the US Department of Education (2003), the availability of program schedule and staff roles and responsibilities are very crucial for the effective implementation of G&C programs. In the present study, however, guidance and counselors did not have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They were preoccupied with routine works coming from the school principal. While ASCA states that school counselors should spend at least 70 % of their time offering direct service to students, the present study showed that most school counselors spent their time on non guidance and counseling activities like being unit leaders and other managerial activities. Adediran (1995) stressed that before the organization and administration of guidance and counseling units in schools, the counselor must be fully aware of the functions of the services and other significant programs of the school.

Other than the absence of program schedule and written plans, almost all school counselors did not have private counseling room. This is contrary to what Ipaye's (1988) and Egbochuku and Iyamu's (2000) suggest. According to them, without a private accommodation counseling will not be successful and delivery of guidance services will be ineffective

Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to assess the provision of G&C services in selected schools of Hareri region and East Harerge zone of Oromia region. Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions were drawn.

The G&C services were poorly utilized by the school community. Let alone utilizing it, the participants had little awareness about its existence. The services were also male dominated. All the surveyed schools except one had male counselors. This had negatively impacted girls' utilization of the services. For example, female students' utilization of G&C services was significantly lower than that of males.

Vocational guidance was less emphasized by all participants including the school guidance and counselors. Issues related to education and disciplines were believed by the participants to be the most important roles of the school G&C programs. Finally, though the G&C programs trained service providers, it did not have clear job descriptions or written plans. The guidance and counselors neither had private counseling rooms nor specified budget that help to effectively implement the programs. Most of the service providers were forced to serve as unit leaders.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

Sanitization and awareness raising activities should be done to the whole school communities about the functions of school G&C programs.

The regional and zonal education bureau should formulate job-descriptions of school guidance and counselors. Schools are also expected to have written plans of the guidance and counseling program.

School guidance and counseling program should be gender responsive. In line with this, female counselors need to be employed in addition to the existing male professionals.

Finally, the education bureau should organize training to all school teachers on the basic principles of guidance and counseling. This can improve the proportion of guidance counselor to students' ratio and teachers' participation in guidance and counseling activities.

References

- Abid, H. (2006). Effect of guidance services on study attitudes, study habits and academic achievement of secondary school students. *Bulletin of Education & Research*, 28(1), 35-45.
- Adediran, S.A. (1995). *Handbook of Guidance and Counseling Ado – Ekiti*. Hope books publishing
- American School Counselor Association - ASCA (2007). *Careers / Roles*. Retrieved January 4, 2012, from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>.
- Baker, S. B. (1982). Free school counselors from the gate keeping and custodial tasks associated with scheduling. *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals*.
- Baker, S. B. (1994). Mandatory teaching experience for school counselors: An impediment to uniform certification standards for school counselors. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 33, 314-326.
- Baker, S. B., & Gerler, E. R. (2001). *Counseling in schools*. In D. C. Locke, J. E. Myers, and E. L. Herr (Eds.), *The Handbook of Counseling*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bhatnagar, A. & Gupta, N. (1999). *Guidance and Counseling*. Vol. II, New Delhi: National Council of Education.
- Cooley, L. (2010). *The power of groups: Solution-focused group counseling in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Egbochuku, E.O. (2008). *Guidance and counseling: A comprehensive text*. Benin City. University of Benin Press.

- Egbochuku, E. O. & Iyamu, E. O. S. (2000). Teachers' and students' perception of guidance and counselling service in Nigerian secondary schools". *Journal of Nigerian Educational Research Association*, 14, 50-56
- Federal Ministry of Education. (2010). Education sector development program IV (ESDP IV) Program Action Plan V2010/2011 – 2014/2015 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Fitch, T. & Marshall, J. L. (2004). What counselor does in high-achieving schools: a study on the role of the school counselor. *Professional School Counselling*, 7(3), 172-177. Retrieved April 12 2006, from, EBSCO database
- Gerler, E. R., Kinney, J., & Anderson, R. F. (1985). The effects of counseling on classroom performance. *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, 23, 155-165.
- Hregewoin, C. & Yusuf, O.A. (1994). Facilitating assertiveness among female college students. Addis Ababa, by EMPDA.
- Ipaye, T. (1983). Guidance and counseling practices. Ile-Ife University Press.
- Kebede, D., Alem, A., Rashid, E. (1999). The prevalence and socio demographic correlates of mental distress in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 100, 5-10
- Lapan, R.T., Gysbers, N.C., & Sun, Y. (1997). The impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on the school experiences of high school students: A statewide evaluation study. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 75, 292-302
- Makinde, O. (1985). *Fundamental of guidance and counseling* London: Macmillian Publishing Ltd
- Myrick, R.D. (1987). *Developmental guidance and counseling: A practical approach*. Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation.
- Neal, G.W. (1983). Personal problem solving: Awareness and utilization of campus helping resources. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 44(112), 3939B.
- Oladele, J. O. (1987). *Guidance and counseling a functional approach. focus on the 6-3-3-4 educational system*. (3rd ed). Lagos: Johns-Lad Publishers Ltd.
- Oladele, J.O. (1985). *Guidance and counselling; A functional approach* Lagos; John-lad enterprises
- Olayinka, M. S. & Omoegun, M. O. (2001). *Principles and practice of guidance and counselling*. Ikorodu, Nigeria: Bab Sheriff Ltd. publishing.
- Shertzer, B. & Shelly, C. S. (1976). *Fundamentals of guidance*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Shertzer, B. & Stone, S. C. (1980). *Fundamentals of counseling*. (3rd ed). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company .
- Unger, R., & Crawford, M. (1992). *Women and Gender: A Feminist Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- US Department of Education National center for Educational statistics. (2003). *High school guidance and counseling* Washington DC,
- Verduyn, C.M., Lord, W., & Forrest, G.C. (1990). Social skills training in schools: An evaluation study. *Journal of Adolescence*, 13, 3-16.

Watanabe-Muraoka, A., Senzaki, T.A., & Edwin, L. (2001). Donald super's contribution to career guidance and counseling in Japan." *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 1, 99 - 106.

Yesilyaprak, B. (2001). *Egitimde Rehberlik Hizmetleri (Guidance Services in Education)*. Ankara: Nobel Yayın (pp. 117-151). Ankara: Pegem Yayıncılık.

Zhang, W., Hu, X., & Pope, M. (2002). The Evolution of Career Guidance and Counseling in the People's Republic of China. *Career Development Quarterly*, 50 (3), 226- 236.