

Challenges guidance and counselling sections face in secondary schools in Lusaka Province in Zambia

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Abstract

The study aimed at establishing challenges guidance and counselling sections face in secondary schools in Lusaka Province in Zambia. A descriptive survey design was used in conducting this research. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The sample consisted 71 boys, 73 girls, drawn from six secondary schools. In selecting the participants from this study, random sampling technique was used. The study employed a number of research instruments which included structured questionnaires and focus group discussion to ensure validity of findings. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer software while the qualitative data was analysed by coding and grouping the emerging themes.

Based on the findings, the study recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Childhood should employ full time trained school counsellors.

It emerged from the study that school counsellors were not available when pupils had questions or problems. The study further revealed that counselling centres in secondary schools lacked materials for pupils to use. The study also revealed that school counselling centres did not keep confidentiality.

Based on the findings, the study recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Childhood should formulate a policy that should govern guidance and counselling sections to in secondary schools.

Keywords: confidentiality, guidance, counselling, sections

Introduction

Preparing children for the transition to adulthood has always been one of humanity's great challenges. Robinson (1996, p.12) ^[34] states that "social experimentation in drugs and sexual relationships have left some casualties among students." A significant number of students also indulge in prostitution, truancy, poor discipline and other misdemeanours (Sexton, 1996; Luzzo & Macgregor, 2001) ^[35, 26]. In the light of all these problems, schools should be more involved in conducting student needs assessment and developing comprehensive guidance and counselling services.

Flood (1997, p. 20) ^[17] defines guidance as, "a term used to denote the process of helping an individual to gain self-understanding and self-direction so that he/she can adjust maximally to his/her home, school, or community environment." Sexton (1996, p.20) ^[35] defines counselling as, "the skilled and principled use of relationships to facilitate self-knowledge, emotional acceptance and growth and the optimal development of personal resources."

The history of school guidance and counselling around the world varies greatly based on how different countries and local communities have chosen to provide academic, career and personal or social skills to its young ones. In the United States, the school guidance and counselling profession began as a vocational guidance movement at the beginning of the twentieth century (Brigman & Campbell, 2003) ^[5].

Since the inception of the profession of school counselling, its role has been redefined and modernized, often times to meet the needs of a changing society or in response to societal events (Dooley, 1990; Kinney & Anderson, 1985) ^[14, 22]. According to Dahir (2004) ^[11], the history of school

counselling has depicted a profession in search of an identity. In the Zambian education system, guidance and counselling is relatively new. In most schools, guidance services are still on trial and error basis due to ill trained counsellors, while in other schools such services are non-existent. There is however, a great awareness of the need for guidance and counselling services in Zambian schools (Ministry of Education, 1996) ^[28].

Statement of the Problem

The increase in the prevalence of problem behaviours during adolescence is a national concern. The study by Kapasa (2011) ^[21] revealed that there was rapid erosion of discipline and lack of respect among children, especially those pursuing secondary education. Truancy and bullying, theft and vandalism are every day experiences in our schools. There is a contagious youth culture of academic negativism and misconduct that can thwart learning and disrupt school routine if not checked.

Carrell (1993) ^[8] argues that, if society is not to be plagued by a group of disgruntled, frustrated and unrealistic individuals, it is desirable that adequate guidance and counselling and career information be provided so that we do not have pupils who graduate from secondary schools without knowing their career path as the case is in most secondary schools in Zambia.

In the face of these problems, the school guidance and counselling sections in secondary schools are supposed to offer a solution in terms of educational, personal, social and career counselling. Very little is known about challenges counselling sections face in secondary schools. There is, therefore, need to examine challenges guidance and

counselling sections face in Zambian secondary schools in order to recommend remedial measures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish challenges facing guidance and counselling sections in secondary schools in Lusaka Province.

Objective

The objective of this study was to:

1. establish challenges guidance and counselling sections face in secondary Schools.

Research Question

2. What challenges do guidance and counselling sections face in secondary schools?

Significance of the study

In Zambia, very little research has been done to establish challenges guidance and counselling sections face in secondary schools. The findings of this research therefore, may benefit researchers, policy makers and school administrators. This study may also add on to the limited literature on guidance and counselling in Zambia. It may also help improve career guidance in secondary schools as it will offer practical suggestions to policy makers on how best guidance and counselling sections in secondary schools can be restructured so that they can be more responsive to the various needs of pupils.

Literature Review

Studies on Pupil discipline

Research done by Lapan and Sun (1997) [23] revealed that counselling decreases classroom disturbances. It supports teachers in the classroom in order to enable them to provide quality instructions designed to assist students in achieving high standards. Students in schools that provided counselling services indicated that their classes were less likely to be disrupted by students who had received counselling. This study therefore, shows that school counselling intervention, can positively affect school behaviour.

Carrell (1987) conducted a study to determine whether smaller student to counsellor ratios were related to better student outcomes. In her research, she used linear regression modelling based on the data from one large district to estimate the impact of reducing elementary student to counsellor ratios on the student discipline problems. She found persuasive evidence that smaller ratios would result in fewer disciplinary problems. She further argued that, determining the most appropriate student to counsellor ratios is a critically important professional issue. The establishment of guidelines for student to counsellor ratios has thus far been based on professional judgment rather than on empirical research. This study was therefore, an important pioneering effort in empirically establishing that more favourable ratios produce better educational outcomes.

A similar study was conducted by Figlio (2005) [15] on the effect of student to counsellor ratio and also provided evidence that lower student to counsellor ratios decreases the recurrences of student disciplinary problems and improves pupil academic performance. These effects were greater for minority and low income students. The empirical

methodologies employed in this research produces unbiased estimates as long as the variation in the student to counsellor ratio is not driven by unobserved factors that affect disciplinary outcomes.

Passarol (2004) [32] reported that at risk secondary school students who were supported with a reality therapy intervention in an in-school support room showed a 42% improvement in their average daily behaviour rating as well as 12% decrease in the total number of out of school suspensions over the course of an academic year. This research has shown that reality therapy techniques may be effective in producing changes in students' locus of control orientation allowing students to see how their own actions may affect their personal outcomes.

A study by Arudo (2008) [11] on peer counselling experience among selected Kenyan high schools found that school counselling is effective in reducing victimization by assisting victimized children, reducing bullies' victimising behaviours and modifying the school climate and structure. The study also revealed that different forms of intervention when used together by school counsellors and teachers can reduce some victimisation related behaviour.

The findings were that, observed physically aggressive behaviour decreased significantly in playground and cafeteria settings and that observed neutral, pro social behaviour increased significantly in the same settings. Parents and teachers rating did not change significantly. Despite these modest findings, this study used a repeated measure design that controlled many mediating factors and it used reliable and valid instruments to measure outcomes. This makes this research a powerful evidence of the value of this curriculum intervention that school counsellors can use in their effort to regulate pupil behaviour in schools.

Flannery (2003) [16] implemented the Peace Builder curriculum group during counselling sessions which focused on reducing aggressive behaviours and increasing social competence with grade tens. He found increases in pro social behaviour and decrease in teacher reported aggressive behaviour.

The merits of this study was that, the researcher took into consideration the covariance of special education status or learning disorders, behavioural problems, family composition, primary language used, classroom atmosphere and academic performance in their analysis of the impact of the intervention.

Despite the efforts made by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (in Kenya) to democratize the school administrative system, as evidenced by the ban of the cane in schools through legal notice of Number 56 of Kenya Gazette (supplement No.25 199 of 30th March, 2001), unrest has continued in secondary schools with a new dimension. Not only are these violent and destructive but they are also premeditated and planned and have caused maximum harm to human life. There seems to be lack of effective alternative strategy to contain student indiscipline.

This can be realized from the fact that the whole country has been experiencing student violence. 'The report of the task force on students discipline and unrest, Republic of Kenya, 2001' recognized the use of guidance and counselling in the management of the students discipline in schools due to its proactive approach. These findings are related to the findings by Simatwa (2007) [36] who stated that if students are well guided, by teachers, they will do the right things related to learning and will become disciplined. On the other

hand, Griffin (2009) ^[19] argued that if students were not properly guided, they can cause discipline problems. Bakhoa (2004) ^[2] maintains that, group counselling is very important for the prevention of student disturbances and to help develop a very free and friendly atmosphere.

Studies that show that school counselling reduces pupils' dropout rate

For most students, entering secondary school is an exciting time and it is considered to be the best time of their lives. Tenth grade students entering secondary school have the opportunity to make new friends, take new courses and become independent by making choices without parental consent. This represents a high shift in autonomy from the elementary and middle school times. Unfortunately, many students are unprepared for the host challenges associated with transition to secondary school. Research findings indicate that entering tenth grade can be one of the emotionally difficult, and most academically challenging times in children's lives (Reents, 2002) ^[33]. Students transforming from middle school to secondary school encounter developmental, social and academic challenges. Reents (2002) ^[33] reports that tenth grade is the most critical point for counsellor and teachers to intervene and prevent students from dropping out of school.

Dropping out of secondary school presents students with various challenges. All students and their parents are challenged to consider the long term consequences associated with dropping out. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) ^[9] reported that several repercussions of dropping out, include; unemployment, reliance upon public assistance, homelessness, imprisonment and increased involvement in criminal activities. Hence given these negative outcomes, it is important for educators especially school counsellors to systematically address the issue of dropout prevention.

Schools are often one of the places where mental health crises and needs of students are recognized and initially addressed. Research indicates that 20% of students are in need of mental health services yet only one out of five of these students receive the necessary services (Kaffenberger & Seligman, 2007) ^[20]. Further students of colour and those from families with low income are at great risk for mental health needs, but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services (Shin, 2006). Students without untreated health issues can develop significant barriers to learning with nearly half of these students eventually dropping out of school.

Larsen and Shertzer (1997) ^[25] emphasized helping potential drop outs to develop more positive self-concepts through group counselling with 10th and 11th graders who evidenced several risk factors associated with dropping out of secondary school. More recently, Bemak (2005) ^[3] proposed empowerment groups for academic success as an innovative approach to preventing failure in at risk urban African American girls in secondary schools.

Diver – Starne (1991) ^[13] researched a peer counselling programme involving an inner – city secondary school. The peer counsellor evaluated the programmes as being effective and gained knowledge about counselling. Morrow (1996) ^[29] examined peer counsellors in secondary school settings. This programme was based on the Natural Helper and Peer Poser Programme. The participants had higher scores on a pen and pencil assessment of communication skills after they participated in the weekend training. Even though there

were more male peer counsellors, the female counsellors reported more helping contacts with other students than did the male peer counsellors. The transference of peer mediation skills to conflictual situation at home were examined in two studies. Gentry and Benson (1992) ^[18] stated that the fourth and sixth graders who had received training through elementary school based peer mediation programmes also used these conflict management skills with conflicts with siblings at home. The research further found that elementary students used the mediation strategies just as frequently at home as they did at school. They also found that there were differences between the strategies children used to resolve conflicts. Before training, the children predominantly used compromising, focusing and withdraw; whereas after training, they primarily used integrative negotiation procedures.

School counsellors may play an important role in dropout prevention; Ochoa (1994) ^[30] interviewed Latino students concerning dropout prevention services. 42 % of the students interviewed indicated that they were not getting the help they needed from the school counsellors or that the school counsellor was unavailable.

Studies on the effect on breach of confidentiality during counselling

West, Kayser, Overton and Saltmarsh (1991) ^[39] conducted a study that examined student perception that inhibit the initiation of counselling and found that students most frequently reported that they:

- a) Do not like to tell a stranger about personal things,
- b) Are afraid that counsellors will break confidentiality,
- c) Believed that school counsellors did not have time
- d) Would be embarrassed to reveal real issues, and
- e) Perceived the school counsellor to be busy and unavailable.

West, *et al.* (1991) ^[39] suggested that client preparation and orientation are vital indicators of understanding what services are available, what counselling actually is and the benefits of counselling. West *et al.*, also found two qualities of a school counsellor, trustworthiness and competence which facilitated help seeking behaviours among students. Confidentiality is an essential component of the counselling relationship (Pale, 2002) ^[31]. All counsellors are faced with difficulty decisions concerning when and how to break confidentiality, they are often challenged with this decision daily. School counsellors must balance the demands of parents, teachers and administrators while respecting the right to privacy of their primary obligations.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used when conducting this research. Since the research sought to collect information about the respondents' opinions on the topic at hand, the descriptive research design was ideal. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection.

Target Population

The population for this study comprised all pupils in secondary schools in Lusaka province in Zambia.

Sample Size

The sample consisted of 144 respondents; 71 boys and 73 girls.

The sample was drawn from the following schools: Chongwe Secondary school and Mukamambo Girls Secondary school (in Chongwe District), Libala Secondary school and St Marys Secondary school (Lusaka District) and Kafue Day Secondary school and Naboye Secondary school (Kafue District).

Sampling Procedures

In selecting the schools which participated in this study, purposive sampling technique was used. This enabled the researcher to have a gender balanced sample as schools selected were a combination of single sex and co-education. Simple random sampling procedure was used to select pupils who participated in this study. This was in order to provide each population element an equal probability of being included in the sample (Bless & Achola, 1988)^[4].

Research Instruments

In this research, structured questionnaires and focus group discussions were used to collect data.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher got permission from the Lusaka Provincial Education Office and from the District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS) of the respective districts in which the research was conducted.

The researcher distributed a consent form and questionnaires to the respondents who were sampled and willing to complete them. Enough time was given to the respondents so that they could complete the questionnaires, after which the researcher collected the questionnaires. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher randomly selected twelve pupils at each secondary school so that they could take part in focus group discussions. During focus group discussions, the researcher moderated all discussions and used a voice recorder so that, the flow of the discussions could not be disturbed. The recorded discussions were later transcribed and analysed.

Data Analysis

McCaig (2010, P. 45)^[27] describes data analysis as “a process that involves organising what you have seen, heard and read, so that you can make sense of what you have learnt.”

The data for this study was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data was analysed using the statistical package for social Sciences (SPSS) computer software to generate tables of frequencies and percentages which were used in describing distributions of the variables. Qualitative data was analysed by coding and grouping the emerging themes. Coding is an interpretative technique that both organises the data and provides a means to introduce the interpretations of it into certain quantitative methods. Most coding requires the analyst to read the data and demarcate segments within it. Each segment is labelled with a "code" – usually a word or short phrase that suggests how the associated data segments inform the research objectives. When coding is complete, the analyst prepares reports via a mix of, summarising the prevalence of codes, discussing similarities and differences in related codes across distinct original sources/contexts, or comparing the relationship between one or more codes (Denzin, 2005).

Ethical Considerations

The study took into consideration ethical issues. The information that was collected was kept strictly confidentially. Consent was sought from all the respondents and their participation was voluntary.

Findings and Discussion

Challenges guidance units face in secondary schools

Whether school counsellors availed themselves to pupils

Pupils were asked to indicate whether their school counsellors had been available to them when they had questions or problems. Table 1 below shows their responses presented according to their grade level.

Table 1: Availability of school counsellors to pupils

Response	Grade level			Total
	Ten	Eleven	Twelve	
Strongly agree	2 (1.4%)	18 (12.5%)	30 (20.8%)	50 (34.7%)
Agree	9 (6.3%)	16 (11.1%)	28 (19.4%)	53 (36.8%)
Not sure	-	-	3 (2.1%)	3 (2.1%)
Disagree	2 (1.4%)	5 (3.5%)	24 (16.7%)	31 (21.5%)
Strongly disagree	-	-	7 (4.9%)	7 (4.9%)
Total	13 (9.0%)	39 (27.1%)	92 (63.9%)	144 (100.0%)

Table 1: shows that 53 (36.8%) agreed and 50 (34.7%) of them strongly agreed that their school counsellors had not been available when they had questions. The majority of those who strongly agreed that, their counsellors were not available were grade twelve pupils, representing 30 (20.8%).

The study revealed that the school counsellors were not available to pupils. About 72% of the pupils stated that their school counsellors were not readily available to them, when they had questions or problems. The reason for the non-availability of the school counsellors may be attributed to the fact that they are not full-time. This finding is in line with Brumma (2000)^[6] who in his study found that school

counsellors were loaded with many duties such as test administration, cafeteria duty and developing school master schedules. These duties according to Brumma (2000)^[6] left school counsellors with inadequate time to use their unique training to help some students and contribute fully to pupils’ successful educational outcomes.

Extent to which careers materials were available in counselling centres

Pupils were also asked to indicate the extent to which careers materials were available in the counselling centres. Table 2 shows their responses.

Table 2: Extent to which careers materials were available in the counselling centres, responses are presented by grade level

Grade	Extent				Total
	Very adequate	Adequate	Not adequate	Not sure	
10	-	-	1 (0.7%)	12 (8.3%)	13 (9.0%)
11	-	4 (2.8%)	18 (12.5%)	17 (11.8%)	39 (27.1%)
12	2 (1.4%)	7 (4.9%)	44 (30.6%)	39 (27.1%)	92 (63.9%)
Total	2 (1.4%)	11 (7.6%)	63 (43.8%)	68 (47.2%)	144 (100.0%)

Table 2 above shows that, the majority of the pupils, 63 (43.8%) indicated that careers materials were not adequate in school counselling centres while 68 (47.2%) said that they were not sure whether careers materials were available. Only 11 (6.7%) indicated that careers materials were adequate in school counselling centres. Of the respondents who were not sure of the adequacy of careers materials in the school guidance sections, 39 (27.1%) were grade twelve pupils while 17 (11.8%) were in grade eleven and 12 (8.3%) were in grade ten. However, only two (2) of the respondents indicated that careers material were very adequate in schools.

As observed above the majority of the pupils (43.8%) said

that careers materials were not adequate in secondary schools. Another interesting finding was that most pupils in secondary schools were not sure (47.2%) whether counselling centres had such counselling materials. This huge level of ignorance or information gap on the part of the pupils just shows that there is a gap between school counselling sections and the pupils.

This finding is similar to Coltle (2001) [10] study whose findings led to a conclusion that guidance and counselling sections were not given the seriousness they deserved.

Pupils were also asked to indicate whether their schools had a private room for counselling. Table 3 shows their responses.

Table 3: Existence of private counselling rooms in schools

Response	Grade level			Total
	Ten	Eleven	Twelve	
Strongly agree	-	-	3 (2.1%)	3 (2.1%)
Agree	-	1 (0.7%)	5 (3.5%)	6 (4.2%)
Not sure	1 (0.7%)	2 (1.4%)	34 (23.6%)	37 (25.7%)
Disagree	11 (7.6%)	25 (17.4%)	37 (25.7%)	73 (50.7%)
Strongly disagree	1 (0.7%)	11 (7.6%)	13 (9.0%)	25 (17.4%)
Total	13 (9.0%)	39 (27.1%)	92 (63.9%)	144 (100.0%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents, 73 (50.7%) said that their schools had no private rooms for counselling whereas 37 (25.7%) were not sure and only three strongly agreed that their schools had private rooms for counselling.

The survey showed that most schools did not have private counselling rooms as evidenced by 68.1% of the pupils who indicated that secondary schools had no private rooms for counselling. One teacher said that when he is handling a sensitive case, he usually takes a walk with a child so that there could be some kind of privacy; this is due to the fact that most secondary schools do not have private counselling

rooms. This finding explains how non-functional some counselling sections are in some secondary schools. The above finding is similar to that of Degiovanni's (1997) study which revealed that 45% of teachers in Botswana said that they did not have private rooms to carry out their counselling functions.

Pupils rating of the challenges of lack of full time counsellors

Pupils were also asked to state whether they had a full time counsellor. Table 4 shows their responses.

Table 4: Availability of full time counsellors in secondary schools

Response	Grade level			Total
	Ten	Eleven	Twelve	
Strongly agree	-	-	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)
Agree	-	1 (0.7%)	11 (7.6%)	12 (8.3%)
Not sure	-	1 (0.7%)	4 (2.8%)	5 (3.5%)
Disagree	2 (1.4%)	19 (13.2%)	27 (18.8%)	48 (33.3%)
Strongly disagree	11 (7.6%)	18 (12.5%)	48 (33.3%)	77 (53.5%)
Total	13 (9.0%)	39 (27.1%)	92 (63.9%)	144 (100.0%)

Table 4 shows that, the majority of the respondents, 77 (53.5%) strongly disagreed and 48 (33.3%) disagreed that their schools had a full time counsellor. Five were not sure. Of the five who were not sure, four were in grade twelve and one was in grade eleven.

This study also revealed that schools do not have full time counsellors as stated by 87% of the pupils who indicated that their schools had no full time counsellors. The lack of full time counsellors in secondary schools in Zambia is due to the fact that, there is no provision yet in the school

structure to employ full time counsellors This finding is in line with Sultane's (2003) study which revealed that most schools in Zimbabwe do not employ full time counsellors due to lack of provision in school structures to employ a full time counsellor.

Confidentiality

Pupils were also asked to indicate whether their school counselling centres kept confidentiality. Figure 1 shows their responses.

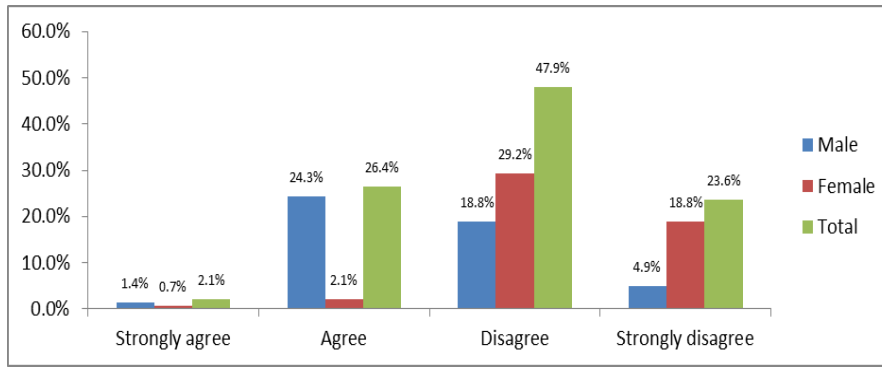


Fig 1: Whether school counselling centre kept confidentiality (n = 144)

Figure 1 above shows that, the majority of the respondents, 69 (47.9%) disagreed while 34 (23.6%) strongly disagreed to the statement that their school counselling centres did keep confidentiality. Among the respondents who disagreed, 27 (18.8%) were males and 42 (29.2%) were females. However, 38 (26.4%) agreed that their school counselling centres kept confidentiality. Of those who agreed that their counselling sections kept confidentiality 35 (24.3%) were males while three (2.1%) were females.

The study showed that the school counsellors do not keep confidentiality. This aspect was reported by 71% of the pupils. One grade eleven (11) girl narrated that girls were scared to talk to the school counsellors because of lack of confidentiality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

It emerged from the study that school counsellors were not available when pupils had questions or problems. This was because school counsellors are also full time class teachers. In terms of the challenges guidance and counselling sections face in secondary schools, the study revealed that counselling centres in secondary schools lacked career materials.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Childhood Education Should:

1. Come up with guidance and counselling policy that will guide the practice of guidance and counselling in secondary schools.
2. Create a position of a full time school counsellor in secondary schools.
3. Devise a deliberate training policy to ensure that all school counsellors receive training.

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