

Perceptions of Teacher Counsellors on Assessment of Guidance and Counselling in Secondary Schools

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Abstract. The need to examine Guidance and Counselling is very significant in schools. This study sought to solicit for teacher counsellor's perceptions on the examination of Guidance and Counselling. The reasons why it should be examined is outlined. Thus, this qualitative study sought to investigate the views of ten teacher counsellors in secondary schools on the examination of Guidance and Counselling. In-depth-interviews were used to collect data from ten teacher counsellors who were purposively selected from various secondary schools in Botswana to take part in the study. The study revealed that 90% teacher counsellors require Guidance and Counselling to be an examinable subject like other subjects. The study concludes that if it can be examined it can improve students' and teachers' attitudes, students will take the subject seriously and it will also encourage behaviour change among learners.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling; assessment; examining; secondary schools

Introduction

Guidance and Counselling is a specialized field that has a wide array of undertakings and services intended to help people to know themselves, their challenges and the environment around them (Egbochuku, 2008; Oniye & Alawane, 2008). Its introduction in schools was to inculcate accountable behaviour amongst students (Chireshe & Mapfumo, 2005). The same sentiments are echoed by Chireshe (2014) and Gudyanya et al. (2015) who noted that Guidance and Counselling came into existence in schools to help students deal with various problems related to academic, career, social and personal issues as they grow up (Gudyanya et al. 2015), with which if ignored can affect their academic performance. These problems are mostly prevalent when students are in their teenage years normally when they are in high school. Teenage years according to Wotuka (2002) is categorised by extreme developmental changes which commonly cause confusion and restlessness; ultimately leading to unacceptable behaviour (Wotuka, 2002). Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) listed the disturbing behaviours as drug and alcohol abuse, indiscipline as well as engagement in crime related activities. Therefore acknowledging Guidance and

Counselling in Education is a very necessary element that every child need as they grow up (Nyamwaka et al., 2013).

The importance of Guidance and Counselling in schools has caught attention of several scholars across the worlds who have written extensively on it. Literature confirms the availability of the Guidance and Counselling programs in many countries around the world (Gudyanya et al., 2015; Nyamwaka et al., 2013; Paisley& McMahon, 2001; Maluwa- Banda, 1998). The concept of Guidance and Counselling even though it is a comparatively new issue in the education structures, has found its existence in most countries of Africa (UNESCO, 2001). In Malawi, Guidance services were introduced to deal with personal, social, educational and career problems that young people were facing (Maluwa-Banda,1998) . Around the 1980's, it was embraced in Zimbabwe (Gudyanya et al., 2015).

In Botswana's education system its introduction dates back to 1985 when selected secondary school teachers were trained to provide career information to students (Stockton & Bhusumane, 2010; Kandjii-Murangi cited in Abosi and Kandjii-Murangi, 1996; Navin, 1989). However, this arrangement changed over time as a recommendation was made to include other components such as educational, personal and social guidance due to problems faced by the youth at the time as well as HIV pandemic in the country. Consequently, the provision of guidance services in counselling centres, agencies, churches, prisons, non-governmental organisations was introduced (Wankiri, 1994). At the moment, Guidance and Counselling is taught and timetabled like any other subject to nurture students' growth and acquiring of skills that promote problem solving skills (Stockton & Bhusumane, 2010; Ministry of Education, 1996). It is offered as an affectively focused subject as stipulated by the Botswana Ministry of Education while other examinable subjects are cognitively focused (Botswana Government, 1994).

Although a lot has been written about Guidance and Counselling, the researcher is not aware of any study on the assessment of Guidance and Counselling. Many researchers have conducted studies on the effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling in different countries. In this study the words examine and assessment will be used interchangeably. Assessment or examination is an important component of the curriculum package. It provides information that is very significant and useful in improving instruction with regard to assessing students' ability to learn numerous ideas and use their own experiences in their daily lives. Simply put, assessment is good because it improves both teaching and learning. It creates a platform where feedback will be given (Cross, 1990). In this case, if the students are assessed then they will acquire more knowledge and ultimately this will impact on their overall behaviour change.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher has observed that Guidance and Counselling is a very vital programme that was established to help students deal with personal, social, academic and career issues. It is not an examinable subject in Botswana schools. As a result, it may possibly mean that since it is not examinable, students will

not take it seriously like other examinable subjects in the school. For example, despite teacher counsellors' tireless efforts of teaching the subject there is lack of change of behaviour amongst students. Therefore this study investigated the views of teacher counsellors on the examination of Guidance and Counselling in secondary schools. Literature on the examination or assessment of Guidance and Counselling is very limited as most of the research focused more on Guidance and Counselling generally (Chireshe, 2014), the need for Guidance and Counselling in schools (Lai-Yeung, 2014) , attitudes of headmasters towards Guidance and Counselling (Chireshe & Mapfumo, 2005) and challenges faced in the implementation of Guidance and Counselling in schools (Shumba et al., 2011). This background signifies that there is a gap to be filled by this study. On the basis of the foregoing, there is need to find out whether examining Guidance and Counselling will have any impact on teachers and student's attitudes as well as student's overall behaviour change.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed at investigating teacher counsellors' views on whether Guidance and Counselling should be assessed in secondary schools.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To investigate teacher counsellors perceptions on the assessment of Guidance and Counselling.
- To establish the impact that examination of Guidance and Counselling has on students overall behaviour change and both teachers and students attitudes.

Significance of study

It is believed that the study will possibly help the school community, students, teachers, school management, policy makers and the Ministry of Education Officers realise the need to examine the Guidance and Counselling subject. Such a move will likely motivate students to realise its importance and hence take it serious like other subjects. The results of its examination can also help enlighten teachers in general to support teacher counsellors as they establish that it is as necessary as any other subject in the school. Furthermore, the findings should add to the limited literature on the subject.

Research Design

In this study the Qualitative approach was employed to explore the views of teacher counsellors on the examination of Guidance and Counselling in secondary schools. This approach provided in-depth understanding of the participants' views on assessment of Guidance and Counselling. The qualitative research made it possible for the researcher to ask for in-depth descriptions, explanations, narratives, meanings and better understanding of the phenomenon under study (Losido, Spandling & Voegtler, 2006). The use of in-depth interviews made it possible for the teacher counsellors to share their views on the examination of Guidance and Counselling.

Population and Sampling

A total of ten teacher counsellors from secondary schools in Botswana were purposively selected to take part in the study. Purposive sampling according to Polit and Beck (2012) is sometimes used when researchers decide to make sample of experts who are best informed about the topic that is being studied. In this case, the teacher counsellors were relevant to share their experiences since they were responsible for teaching and coordinating the Guidance and Counselling department. It also allowed the researcher to gather rich data from the participants. The sample was made up of three male and seven female teachers. The participants were all senior teacher Guidance and Counselling except one who was acting for that position. Only three of them were trained and qualified to teach Guidance and Counselling.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The interviews were chosen because they enabled the researcher to probe for more clarity from the participants (Kvale, 1996) about their views concerning the assessment of Guidance and counselling. As such, the researcher was able to understand a phenomenon from the participant point of view (Kvale, 1996). Since semi-structured interview questions do not follow a specific layout, it created easiness for the researcher to be able to include other questions raised during the interview. This permitted asking questions to investigate the perceptions of teacher counsellors about assessment of Guidance and Counselling. In addition, the interviews were audio-recorded by use of a tape recorder. This was necessary because it allowed the researcher to get accurate information from what the participants were saying and therefore not waste time taking notes (Wayner, 2005).

Data collection

The main data collection process began between the months of June and August 2015. In the interest of the participants' comfort, they indicated the time for the interviews and most of the interviews were done in the Guidance and Counselling office. The duration of the interviews was between 50 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes. Pseudonyms such as STR1, STR2 and STR3 were used to refer to the participants.

Data Analysis

Data collected was transcribed, coded and analysed.

Ethical issues

Permission was sought from the School Heads to interview the teacher counsellors. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and sought for informed consent from the participants verbally. Permission to record the interview was also obtained from the participants (Strydom et al., 2005). The participants were also advised that they are free to withdraw any time during the study if they so wish. Confidentiality was emphasised (Du Preez, 2005).

Findings and discussion

Perceptions of teacher counsellors on assessment of Guidance and Counselling

Majority of the participants expressed their desire for Guidance and Counselling to be examined. They emphasised the need because of the current situation of how Guidance and Counselling is perceived in schools so they felt that maybe if it can be examined it will be embraced like other examinable subjects. They indicated that how people respond to the subject has an impact on the attainment of the desired goals, which are behaviour change and life skills. This is what some participants said *'it should be examined because maybe the negative attitudes that teachers and students have about the subject will come to an end'* (STR1, male). *'Some subject teachers take it for granted. They think it is waste of time and hence use G&C lesson to cover their material'* (STR4, female).

The participants described how the subject should be examined but they had differing views on the implementation part. Some felt that the examination should focus mostly on mastery of life skills through the use of questionnaires. Some highlighted that the habit of awarding certificates to best performers could also be used as a motivation element. STR6 said that even if the grading part is not similar to other examinable subjects but Guidance and Counselling mark should be part of the final mark in the certificate, as explained by this participant: *'It shouldn't be graded like core subject but it should be part of the overall mark in the certificate'* (STR6, female). STR2 concurred with STR6 that assessment should not be like other subjects but further stressed that emphasis should be on attainment and acquisition of life skills as Gudyanya et al. (2015) asserted that the skills acquired are very important as they help students face future life complexities, and this can be effective if they know how to apply them in their lives (Onyewadume (2008). Participants reflected similar sentiment: *' I think it should be examined, even if it cannot be assessed like other subjects but there should be an exam where emphasis is on life skills'* (STR2, male) .

'Based on my experiences, I would say yes it should be examined but the assessment should be in a form of questionnaires to assess the skills that the students have learnt in class' (STR3, male).

On the contrary, only 20% of the participants reported that since Guidance and Counselling is a service it cannot be examined. However, only one reason was given to support that there is no need to incorporate the assessment component. The participants stressed that testing a service can always be a challenge because most of the topics in the syllabus were drawn to allow discussions. This supports the findings of Onyewadume's (2008) that the preferred methods that teacher counsellors normally use in their guidance lessons are class presentations and discussions. This finding may possibly mean that examining the subject could not be so easy.

Furthermore, the participants also associated lack of recognition of Guidance in schools with it not being examinable. This implies that if it is examined it will help students appreciate and realize the necessity to take it seriously like other

examined subjects. This is what STR6 noted: *'Yes it should be examined. The fact that it is not examined allows students to ignore it and hence fail to give it priority it deserves'* (STR6, female)

Impact of assessment of Guidance and Counselling

With regard to this question four themes emerged from the data namely: it improves attitude, students will take the subject seriously, teacher counsellors will be supported and encourage behaviour change among learners.

It can improve attitudes

An attitude according to Wade and Tarvis (1993) is a justly steady view concerning a person, object or activity comprising of both the cognitive component as well as an emotional component. With regard to this theme, the percentage of teachers who admitted that assessing Guidance and Counselling will change the overall student and teachers attitudes towards the subject was very high. 85% of the participants said it will change students' and teachers' view of the subject. Students find a difficulty to perceive Guidance and Counselling as a subject in the same way they do with other academic subjects. The assumption is that since it is not an examinable subject students tend to develop negative attitudes towards it and as such give it less attention. Similarly, some teachers feel Guidance and Counselling is a waste of time. Gerler Jnr (1992) posits that school supervisors on the other hand disregard Guidance and Counselling because its results are not clearly specified so their focus is more on examinable subjects where the results are relatively clear such as high performance rate as well as low dropout rate. From this view one can argue that if Guidance and Counselling is examined it will attract students and teachers attention to embrace and take it seriously. Showing how Guidance and Counselling continues to be stigmatised in the schools, the following was stated: *'both teachers and students have a negative attitude on this subject. They feel its waste of time so if it is examined it will be accorded the same respect as other subjects in school'* (STR1, female).

In other schools there are cases where some teachers are allowed to help the teacher counsellors teach Guidance and Counselling lessons. Unfortunately, the teachers instead of teaching Guidance and Counselling material they teach their examinable subjects in which they specialise on in order to push the syllabus. Participants further stressed that if this habit goes on unchecked, the students may spend the whole term without being taught Guidance and Counselling lesson and ascribed this to lack of thorough supervision and training. Thus, impacts negatively on the overall behaviour and growth of the students as they are denied the opportunity to cover Guidance and Counselling material. It makes sense that Yuen (2002) supported training for all teachers as it makes sense in such instances. It may be implied that the bad student behaviour rampant in schools maybe a result of this trend as students would not have had the opportunity to be guided well during a Guidance and Counselling lesson. To emphasise this point one participant noted that *'teachers feel that it is a waste of time that is why some of them use the guidance lessons to cover the material of their subject areas'* (STR3, male). Similarly, STR9 explained that *'the fact that it is not*

examined like other subjects, students take that guidance lesson is a free period to play, to visit the toilet or finish assignments given by other subject teachers...' (STR9, female).

The participants emphasised that lack of training or skills by some of the teacher counsellors may be the reason why students end up disliking the subject. This is supported by what Stockton et al., (1994) had found out that some of the teacher counsellors in schools are not trained and hence this adversely affects their Guidance and Counselling delivery (Lai-Yeung, 2014). From the study 30% of the participants who stated that they were trained were the ones who confessed that students had interest in their lessons and were always looking forward for a guidance lesson. Therefore this may suggest that the untrained teachers because of their lack of training encounter challenges to handle the lessons as compared to their counterparts who are trained. This makes sense because Shumba et al. (2011) in their study found that 50% of the teachers who were not trained in Guidance and Counselling had difficulties to deliver mainly because of lack of competence. This report is similar to Lombo's (1993) view that lack of training among school counsellors can make teachers and students have negative attitudes towards Guidance and Counselling. It may not be wrong to conclude that some students out of desperation find themselves idling and hence ultimately use the guidance lesson to engage in unwanted behaviour.

The impression given was the fact that Guidance and Counselling has no value hence why it is not given much attention in schools. It is clear that the above sentiments signify that if Guidance and Counselling could be examined the attitudes of both teachers and the students would change for the better. The participants illustrated that Guidance and Counselling is not given the necessary respect it deserves. This finding is similar to Hui's (2002) finding in China that teachers and students attitudes have on the subject affect the efficiency of Guidance and Counselling services. Similarly, Reynolds and Cheek (2002) also found that negative attitudes of the students and school administrators affect the usefulness of Guidance and Counselling services. Therefore, if this is the case its effectiveness is compromised because of the attitude from both the teachers and the students. Thus, it is very necessary to fight the negativity and aim for the best in schools.

Students will take the subject seriously

Taking the subject seriously in this context means putting effort and working hard in all Guidance and Counselling lessons and activities. The participants emphasised that if the subject is examined students will always prepare for it and enable them to be more active during Guidance lessons. However, they indicated that this subject is very different from other subjects where students have to master content, but that they need skills such as problem solving skills and decision making skills to help them in their behaviour change. Since it positively moulds behaviour this may ultimately help the subject to find its way in being recognised in schools. About 75% of the participants asserted that if it is examined things will change.

'If it is examined the students will treat it like any other subject...' (STR5, female)

'...the students will take it more serious...' (STR6, female)

'It can help improve learners overall academic performance' (STR7, female)

Teacher counsellors will be supported

To support means to offer assistance to someone. The outcomes of giving support are most of the times positive. The participants asserted that examining Guidance and Counselling will lead it to be recognised like other examinable subjects. They further stressed that lack of support is bound to be there if teachers still feel that Guidance and Counselling is just a waste of time. Teachers in schools need to know and acknowledge the role of Guidance and Counselling in moulding students' behaviour. This knowledge and appreciation demands a collective support from the school management and teachers. Research has shown that lack of support for Guidance and Counselling is common in most countries mostly by school supervisors (Lombo, 1993; Maluwa- Banda, 1998). Noticeably, failure to support Guidance and Counselling teachers in schools exacerbates students' negative attitudes and in the process frustrates the teacher counsellors who have been subjected to unfair treatment of not being recognised and assisted (Maluwa- Banda, 1998). Similarly, Shumba and his colleagues also found that lack of support by the school management hinders Guidance and Counselling to generate a positive impact in schools (Shumba et al., 2011). The expressions above echo this reality that teacher counsellors are not supported by the management of the school.

Encourage behaviour change among learners

Most of the participants expressed that since Guidance and Counselling put emphasis on behaviour change, then if it is examined, it will motivate students to strive for the best behaviour in order to gain certificates. This is in line with Dixon (2008) view that motivation is a determinant of change of behaviour. In this sense certificates will be used to motivate change of behaviour among students. Some participants highlighted that this will cultivate the spirit of competition among the students as they will work harder to improve their moral behaviour. This is in line with Okumu's view that Guidance and Counselling is "all about change" (p, 4) and if this change is evident ultimately, there will be peace and harmony in schools.

Conclusion

Given these sentiments, two major conclusions emerged from the findings:

The majority of the participants, 90% were of the view that G & C should be made an examinable subject. If it were made so, the following benefits would be accrued:

The researcher has observed that assessing Guidance and Counselling according to the data obtained would possibly change the negative attitudes that teachers and students have about the subject. Students might take Guidance and

Counselling seriously, while on the other hand teachers will not feel it is as a waste of time. Student's behaviour is likely to change as well.

Only trained teachers should teach Guidance and Counselling because lack of training contributes to lack of recognition of its significance as well as struggling to know what to do in a guidance lesson. As a consequence, the Guidance and Counselling overall delivery of the material is affected.

The author therefore concludes that until Guidance and Counselling is regarded fundamental like other examinable subject the expected behaviour change among learners and negative attitudes of both teachers and students will possibly not come any time soon in schools. As a result, examining the subject can act as a stepping stone in the realisation of its significance in schools.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Guidance and Counselling should be an examinable subject.

All teacher counsellors should be trained for the subject.

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