

Students' Conceptions of Role of Guidance and Counselling in Discipline Management in Secondary Schools in K1rinyaga County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Discipline is vital in the success of educational processes. Guidance and Counselling (GC) have been adopted as strategy to manage student discipline the world over including Kenyan schools. Though students form the major clientele of services provided in schools, studies regarding provision of counselling and guidance in relation to management of learners' behaviour have largely ignored students' conceptions. This study sought to establish students' conceptions of the role of GC in managing discipline among learners in public secondary schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. The descriptive survey research design was used and a sample of 167 students was randomly taken from 13 secondary schools and questionnaires used to collect data. Results indicated that though students knew of availability of counselling services, they rarely sought them. The study further noted that students experienced punitive forms of punishment, including corporal punishment, despite availability of GC departments and government policies guiding the handling of learners' discipline in Kenyan schools. The study concluded that secondary school students sampled have not fully embraced GC services. Therefore, the practice of GC as currently structured, may fail as a discipline management strategy. The recommendations based on findings are that the Education Ministry and School Boards of Management should not only enforce government policies on discipline management and explore ways of winning students' confidence in the GC services.

Key words: Counseling, Discipline, Expulsion, Guidance, Punishments, Suspension

INTRODUCTION

The centrality of discipline in education and the moral growth of children cannot be gainsaid (Nanyiri, 2014). Okumbe (1998) argues that in the endeavor to achieve the vision and mission of a learning institution, all members of the institution ought to strictly observe behaviour patterns necessary for maximum output. Similarly, Nelson (2002) posits that maintenance of high level of discipline by students is important in their efforts to achieve high educational standards successful education According to Nanyiri (2014), therefore, teaching and learning cannot go on well without a disciplined atmosphere. Despite the crucial role of discipline in academic pursuit, there are concerns in many parts of the world in as far as secondary school students' discipline is concerned (Lam & Hui, 2010; Nanviri, 2014; Wambui, 2015; Wango, 2006). Lam and Hui (2010) argue that students in many secondary schools across the globe exhibit signs of struggling with problems associated with growing up as evidenced by the growing cases of suicide, violence, emotional hardships, behavioral problems, family problems and drugs, teenage issues revolving around self-esteem, inter-personal relationships, and sexuality challenges. Further,

Nanyiri (2014) asserts that unwanted behaviour on the part of the students which is on the increase implied a scenario where GC services offered in Kenyan secondary schools could not match the expectations of educational stakeholders.

Although GC has been adopted as an appropriate method of promoting positive discipline in educational institutions in different parts of the world, research findings present worrying results on the success of GC in schools. With regard to the African setting, Maluwa-banda (1997) studied perception held by Malawi's Secondary school counsellors'. The research noted that school counselors were regular teachers with no formal preparation to offer guidance and counselling. These findings pointed to challenges bedeviling provision of these helping services in educational institutions. Mlalazi, Rembe and Shumba (2016) establish that though there were few areas of successful institutionalization of the programmes, there were serious drawbacks which included lack of facilities.

In Nigeria, Egbochuku, 2008, as cited in Mlalazi et al. (2016) indicate that GC programmes were availed to students after punishments and this discouraged learners from voluntarily seeking the services. In a study which surveyed

execution of counselling and guidance in Chinhoyi Urban schools, Gudyanga, Wadesango, Manzira, and Gudyanga (2015) noted that only a single school in the study area sampled had a functional GC programme. Further, Khansa (2015) (as cited in Mlalazi et al. (2016), reported that in Lebanon, counsellors were poorly equipped to provide GC services in their schools. Similarly, Kok Low and Lee (2012) noted that there were misconceptions on the GC services in secondary schools amongst different educational players,

In the Kenyan context, the contribution GC services in maintenance and control of students' discipline has been underscored by many government circulars on the subject (Wambui, 2015). In spite of the policy support accorded to GC, findings paint a gloomy picture on the success of guiding and counseling of student. Wango's (2006) study on effects of policy and practice of GC in secondary schools in Kenya, established that despite the insistence on this approach, the setting up of GC services to learners was fragmented in scope, highly variable and largely dependent on individual schools. Wango (2006) research presented a scenario where the quality of GC services offered in Kenyan secondary schools failed to meet the expectations of educational stakeholders. These findings concurred with Wambui (2015) who emphasized on importance of having GC services educational institutions in Kenya. Wambui further observed that teacher counselors were few and thus overwhelmed by the high number of secondary' school students. Consequently, these counselors ended up being ineffective in their GC duties. The views held by Wambui (2015) and Wango (2006) were supported by Ajowi and Simatwa (2010) who noted that GC services were rarely used in the promotion of discipline among learners' in the study region. Further, Ajowi and Simatwa established that corporal punishment was commonly used to solve cases of discipline. These practices contradicted the Ministry of Education guidelines on discipline management among secondary school learners. Interestingly, it was later confirmed by Simatwa (2012) that students disregarded GC as an option for improving positive behaviour in the schools. In Simatwa's study, 50% of the sampled respondents indicated that GC was for individuals who lacked the capacity to solve their own problems and those who exhibited signs of behavioral and emotional problems.

The challenges bedeviling the use of GC in schools in Kenya are endless; majority of teacher counsellors lacked the requisite competencies and training in handling school discipline issues (Kamore & Tiego, (2015). According to Ngumi (2003), even teachers who were said to be trained in guidance and counselling were found to have covered insufficient number of courses. They were thus not fully prepared for guiding and counselling students in a manner that could satisfy educational stakeholders and promote positive discipline among students. In addition to these challenges, Wango (2006) notes that though teachers are ideally placed to provide information and offer help, the priorities in school might be different. Lam and Hui (2010) study confirmed these observations and added that teacher counsellors have to overcome obstacles arising from varied students' needs.

It has been observed that despite the emphasis given to GC in supervision of discipline among learners, in Kenyan secondary schools, the success of this approach has not yet satisfied educational stakeholders. Students' discipline in many parts of this country continues to be an issue of concern. Studies on guidance and counselling have largely concentrated on teachers and school administrators. Thus, students' conceptions of guidance and counselling have not been completely investigated.

Despite the Ministry of Education adopting guidance and counselling as a strategy to promote positive discipline, Kenya's education system has witnessed a worrying upsurge of indiscipline among students. Incidences of bullying, arson, unrest, destruction of property, truancy, drug and substance abuse, among others, have been increasing tremendously among secondary school students in different parts of Kenya. Educational stakeholders are getting worried about students' aggression directed towards their own teachers. The disturbing question has been: what is ailing learners' discipline in educational institutions in Kenya?

Available literature confirms gaps in the effective use of GC as an approach to maintenance of student discipline in educational institutions. Further, studies on GC with regard to discipline management have not been exhaustive and have largely ignored students' conceptions. Students experience myriad discipline issues and they are the major clients of GC services in secondary school. This study, therefore, sought to explore students' conceptions on how this approach has been used in promoting student discipline in secondary schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. Conceptions in this context relate to how students think about or perceive the nature and purpose of guidance and counselling.

Objective

This study set out to establish students' conceptions on the role on GC in discipline management in secondary schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya,

Theoretical Framework

This research was informed by the Bandura (1982) Self-efficacy theory. This theory postulates that an individual's belief in their intrinsic capacity to accomplish objectives and adapt to difficulties. According to Bandura, individuals with high levels of self-efficacy have a lot of determination to successfully accomplish a task whereas people with low levels of self-efficacy are more likely to give up when confronted by challenges, thus leading to failure. Students in secondary schools from all over the world face myriad challenges which may impede the achievement of their academic goals. Success of guidance and counselling as a strategy to address students' challenges and indiscipline issues seems unguaranteed (Ajowi & Simatwa (2010); Lui & Hui (2010); Simatwa (2012); Wambui (2015); Wango (2006). Although Lam and Hui (2010) stressed the importance of teachers buy-in and participation in the success of GC programmes, learners' readiness to seek services is indispensable in the success of the programme in promoting positive behaviour among students in secondary school. Students' participation

in guidance and counselling activities may largely depend on their beliefs and conceptions of the GC services available in schools.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was essentially a descriptive survey research. Descriptive designs are suitable for this investigation which sought to establish conceptions held by secondary school students on GC as a mechanism for discipline management. The research involved a sample of 167 students randomly selected from 13 secondary schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. The sample comprised 38% male and 62% female drawn from forms one to four. Most of these students (85%) were in Forms two, three and four. Majority of them (71%) were in the age bracket of 15 and 18 years. With this background the researcher assumed that the responses obtained gave an accurate reflection of the GC practice in the region and that their responses represented their conceptions on this approach as used in discipline management in the schools.

Validated questionnaires were used in the data collection exercise. Items in these instruments were framed in a simple and straight-forward language due to the fact that the study targeted secondary school students with varying academic backgrounds. The instruments had both open-ended and close-ended items specifically designed to collect data on learners' conceptions of GC in relation to management of discipline in the secondary schools.

Data was collected through students' questionnaires. This instrument had 2 items that sought students' views on the availability of GC departments in their schools. There were another 2 items that required students to indicate the effectiveness of GC services in their schools. There were three items that sought students' views on forms of punishment meted on students who broke school rules. Before proceeding to the sampled schools to collect data, the instrument was subjected to a panel of experts' scrutiny to ensure content validity. A pilot study was also conducted in ten schools in Nyeri County. To test the reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's Alpha was used and a reliability measure of 0.7 was obtained indicating that the tool was reliable. Analysis of qualitative data involved organizing the responses into themes as per the objective of the study. This facilitated the analysis of the trends by use of descriptive statistics aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Means, frequencies and percentages showed the trends.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To achieve the research objective, information was sought from students in respect of their conceptions of GC services offered in schools, punishments administered to instill discipline among students and other discipline procedures used in the school. Students' responses were analyzed along the study themes giving results of the conceptions held by students with regard to GC and management of discipline.

Availability and Effectiveness of GC Services in the Schools

Students were requested to indicate whether GC departments were present in their schools. GC departments are anticipated to provide values to learners. This item was meant to assess whether students were aware of the existence of GC services in schools. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1 shows that majority of the learners (98%) indicated that GC departments were present in their schools. Only 2% failed to give information on existence of guidance and counselling departments in schools. These findings showed that most of the targeted institutions had the departments and most of the students had information about the existence of GC services. These findings concur with Simatwa's (2012) study which established that public secondary schools in Kenya had GC services. The presence of GC departments in schools could be attributed to the Ministry of Education policy that required all schools to establish these departments. The challenge was whether or not the departments were performing their roles effectively as expected.

The success of GC programmes, largely depends on learners volunteering to seek the services. Consequently, an item to probe whether students sought GC services was incorporated in the data collection instrument. Responses to this item are summarized in Table 2.

Results in Table 2 indicate that more than half of the students (55%) indicated that they did not seek any services from the guidance and counselling department. Only 45% of students indicated that they sought the services. These results imply that though students had awareness pertaining to the availability of GC services, more than half of the sampled students did not seek those services. Thus, despite availability of these critical services, majority of the students are not benefiting from them. These observations agreed with the findings of Wango (2006) who noted that though teachers are ideally placed to offer help as specialized counselors, they do not often have the rapport with the pupils and students leading to students failing to seek their help. The findings further agree with Simatwa's (2012) study which established that students in the sampled schools disregarded GC services thus, hampering the implementation of the government policy. In Simatwa's study, 50% of the prefects said

Table 1. Presence of guidance and counseling departments

Departments	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	160	98
No	7	2
Total	167	100

Table 2. Visits to department for service

Visits by students	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	72	45
No	88	55
Total	160	100

that guidance and counselling was for those students who could not solve their own problems and those who showed behavioral and emotional difficulties. These notions would hinder students voluntarily seeking guidance and counselling services to avoid stigmatization. Consequently, students may continue suffering with unresolved issues which may later escalate to serious discipline matters.

The results obtained in this study further concurred with the findings of the *Presidential Committee on Students' Unrest and Indiscipline in Kenyan Secondary Schools* (Republic of Kenya, 2001). This committee asserted that the GC policy had not been fully implemented in most schools portending failure in the adoption of this approach as a tool for management of students' discipline. The results obtained in this study bolster Wango's (2006) assertion that in most Kenyan secondary schools, the running of GC services was somewhat fragmented and highly variable. The same findings were recorded by Maluwa-banda (1997) and Mlalazi et al. (2016) who alluded to drawbacks that hindered effective execution of GC programmes in their study regions.

If GC is to succeed, school administrators and teacher counselors should explore ways of encouraging learners to willingly seek GC services. This can happen if teacher counselors reconsider the approaches used in the implementation of this programme. Lam and Hui (2010) discussed approaches that may be applied in availing guidance and counselling services in schools. Though the most preferred and highly effective approach is the individualized form of counselling, Lam and Hui (2010) and Auni (2010 as cited in Mlalazi et al., 2016) recommended the whole-school approach as opposed to individualized counselling. These authors argue that the whole-school approach may avail GC services to a big number of students at any one sitting. Thus, schools can adopt the whole-school approach as a starting point to win students' confidence in guidance and counselling services. Students may later personally seek the services from the departments. However, the danger in this approach is that its effectiveness may not be guaranteed. On the other hand, Auni (2010, as cited in Mlalazi et al., 2016) supported the peer-counselling approach in which students seek help from fellow learners as an endeavour to bring counselling services closer to the students.

Punishment of Students

Information relating to students' conceptions on forms of punishment in the schools was sought. An item designed to establish students' conceptions of the use of physical punishment in their schools was included in the data collection instrument. Table 3 summarizes the results.

Table 3. Prevalence of corporal punishment in schools

Have you ever been caned in school?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	140	98
No	3	2
I don't know	0	0
Total	143	100

Analysis of the prevalence of corporal punishment showed that 98% of students had been caned in the school and only 2% had not. These findings indicated high prevalence of corporal punishment in total disregard of the various Ministry of Education policies banning corporal punishment in Kenyan schools. The high prevalence of caning established in this study support Simatwa and Ajowi's (2010) findings that caning was commonly used to solve discipline cases in the schools sampled for their study. These findings are worrying considering the presence of GC departments in schools (Simatwa, 2012).

Students were further asked to indicate other forms of punishment experienced in their schools. Students indicated that other forms of punishments included students being sent out of class, kneeling down, doing manual work, being suspended and expelled from school as shown in Table 4 below:

Analysis of these forms of punishments showed that 12% of students indicated that they were at one time excluded from class, 11% made to kneel down, eight percent suspended. 18% given manual work and four percent were given other punishments. It was established that in all these forms of punishments, students missed learning time. This was confirmed by the fact that 53% of the students indicated that all forms of punishment meted on students resulted in loss of learning time. This study noted that punishments administered to students in the study region were not only punitive but made students miss classes and this has dire implications on students' academic performance and character formation.

The above results agree with the findings of studies done by Muthoga (as cited in Nanyiri, 2014). Muthoga asserted that some forms of punishments in schools ended up contradicting efforts towards improvement of academic performance. Muthoga noted that in some cases, students feared going to school. Further, Wango (2006) noted that school administrators sometimes deal with indiscipline cases punitively rather than referring the cases to teacher counsellors. It is worrying that school administrators and teachers continue using out-dated forms of punishments when GC services are available right inside their schools. Perhaps this is the reason why students fail to seek GC services. Students' failure to seek such services could be complicated by instances where students are referred for guidance and counselling after punishments as noted by Mlalazi et al. (2016). According to these authors, in such situations, only very few learners would seek GC services from their teachers in schools.

The research also sought information on the prevalence of suspensions and expulsions as forms of punishments in the

Table 4. Action taken for students' minor offences

Action taken against minor offenders	Frequency	Percentage
Exclusion from class	20	12
Kneeling down	18	11
Caned	78	47
Suspended	13	8
Do manual work	30	18
Others	7	4
Total	167	100

sampled schools. Results showed that 69% of the students indicated that students were suspended when they committed major offences while 28% indicated that students are expelled. This analysis shows that suspensions and expulsions were prevalent in schools. These findings confirm Nanyiri's (2014) argument that some forms of punishments in schools ended up contradicting efforts directed towards improvement of academic performance. It is worth noting that discipline procedures applied in some of the Kenyan schools may work against the government's efforts not only to improve the student retention rates but also realization of one hundred per cent student transition from primary to secondary schools. If Kenya is to become a globally competitive country offering high quality life to its citizenry as envisaged by *Kenya Vision 2030* development blueprint, guidance and counselling ought to be fully embraced as a discipline management strategy in Kenyan schools. Punishments that lead to learners missing learning opportunities should be discouraged.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that though guidance and counselling departments are present in most of the sampled schools and learners are aware of their existence, less than half of students sought services from those departments. It was also concluded that guidance and counselling has not fully been adopted as an approach to manage discipline in the schools. This is confirmed by the fact that corporal punishment and other inhuman forms of punishment still thrived in schools, contrary to the Ministry of Education policy guidelines. Lastly, most punishments meted out on students in secondary schools in Kirinyaga County resulted in students missing learning time.

This study makes a number of recommendations. Firstly, the study recommends that secondary schools in Kenya should sensitize students on the services offered by GC departments and also improve the capacity of GC teachers through training and provision of the necessary resources. Secondly, the study recommends that schools should handle students' discipline issues professionally and adhere to the government policy that banned of corporal punishment. Lastly, the Ministry of Education, school Boards of Management (BOMs) and principals should enforce this regulation and sanction those teachers who contravene the ban on corporal punishment.

Since this study looked at students' conceptions of the role of GC in discipline management in schools, studies should be conducted to establish disparities in discipline issues between day and boarding schools. Further, studies may be conducted to establish the relationship between qualifications of GC teachers and the effectiveness of GC services in their schools.

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