



STUDENT PREFERENCES OF A HELP-GIVER IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMME

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Abstract:

School guidance and counselling plays a critical role in the development of learners' wellbeing without which effective learning may not take place. This paper reports the findings of a study done in Nairobi County to ascertain students' preferences of a help-giver. Nelson Le-Gall's theory of help seeking was selected as the key theoretical perspective to anchor the study. The survey design was adopted for the study and a stratified random strategy used to draw a sample from form two students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. The questionnaire comprising Likert-type items was the main research tool. Validity of the items was established by checking on the extent to which the items were aligned to the construct of interest while reliability was done using the split half technique. The study found that students in Public secondary schools in Nairobi County expressed experiencing concerns related to response to assignments and study habits for which counseling was sought. The students were least likely to share their concerns with teachers but preferred peers with whom they had much in common. Further, the study revealed that students would rather live without sharing their issues with teacher-counselors or other adults in the school. The study recommends the training of peer counselors in public secondary schools in Nairobi as a strategy to improve learner's health and personal effectiveness.

Keywords: help-giver, student preferences, wellbeing, guidance and counseling

1. Introduction

Educational policies in the world over have sought to provide quality education for school-going learners. For instance, in Kenya's Vision 2030 the Social pillar has been

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supported by provision of instructional materials and teacher education to ensure that learners not only reap the maximum benefits from the school but also to help them take up their rightful place in the actualization of the Vision. However, whenever teaching and learning takes place there are attendant problems and needs that may interfere with learners' wellbeing and personal effectiveness. Provision of guidance and counseling services in the school alone is insufficient in helping students cope with the problems they encounter as they interact with the curriculum and the school community. While it should afford learners an opportunity to help them develop self-understanding and take advantage of school dynamics to achieve their potentials, Okola (2005) observed that schools lack adequately trained personnel to address the ever-increasing students' needs for guidance and counseling. Not only have the number of students requiring counseling increased, but teachers to offer these services are overloaded with teaching and administrative duties. More focus has been given to discipline related concerns leaving the other academic and social dimensions poorly attended to or completely ignored.

2. Statement of the Problem

The establishment of school guidance and counseling programmes has not been able to wipe out strikes, learner attrition, aggression and violence, negative attitude to learning or declining mean scores. While counseling needs among members of the school community continue to increase, school managers seem to pay more attention on improving mean scores and academic performance. Research has been done effectiveness of school guidance and counseling programme (Coleman, 2009; Gibson, 2008), attitudes of teachers and students to the programme but it is unclear on what actually influences students' preferences on the choice of a help-giver. The study sought students' preferences of a help-giver in public secondary schools in Nairobi County.

3. Theoretical Underpinning

Help-seeking has been viewed as a process of looking for resources exterior to the self to find information or strategies that will facilitate task accomplishment or problem resolution in an academic activity (Karabenick & Knapp 1991, in Ogan, 2009). Any student who seeks help in the school therefore experiences issues they cannot cope with since they lack internal resources such as motivation, attitudes or cognitive strategies that may facilitate problem resolution resulting in wellness and a successful learning experience. The study was anchored on Nelson-Le Gall's (1981) theory of help-seeking behavior. The theorist explains that help-seeking is indeed a process that takes place in a series of five steps or stages comprising activities that a student who seeks help in the school may undertake consciously or otherwise. To begin with, the student has to be aware of their inadequacy and need for help. This is the realization that one's own resources are insufficient for problem resolution. The second step encompasses making a decision to seek help to resolve the issue that hinders personal effectiveness while the

next stage entails the identification of a potential help-giver based on opportunities available in the school context and the urgency of solving the problem. The fourth step calls for the student to use strategies at their disposal to elicit help from external sources. Finally, the student will evaluate the success of help-seeking endeavour in terms of whether the help was sufficient to attain desired goals.

4. Literature Review

There is a growing body of research evidence to unpack learners' issues for which help may be sought from a guidance and counseling service provided in the school. While guidance and counseling programme as an integral part of the education programme, Cooley (2010) views it as developmental by design that focuses on students' needs interests and issues. Kombo (1998) and Gitonga (1999) found that students seem to have the wrong notion about school guidance and counseling programme. How then can students seek help from a service for which they have the wrong notion particularly in social and academic contexts?

Guidance and counseling service providers in schools are overloaded with teaching and administrative duties rendering them ineffective in responding adequately to the ever increasing student concerns. For instance Guven, (2003) found that teachers who were assigned guidance and counseling duties received little support from the school administration but instead were required to perform amorphous tasks unrelated to school counseling. In the same vein, Nyamwange, Yakan & Odima (2012) also found that there were very few teachers trained to offer school guidance and services and facilities were also inadequate to support effective implementation of the programme. Further, Karabenick (2009) observes that teachers may not know why students do not seek help in the classroom and that teachers may not have received adequate training in help-seeking during their professional preparation (Fulya, 2009). During the high school years students' are seeking for identity and the costs of looking foolish in front of teachers and peers influences the kind of help they seek and when to get it (Keifer, 2000). Lately there has been a lot of emphasis on mean improved mean scores as an indicator of school effectiveness.

While teachers may be overloaded with teaching duties (Rayle, 2006) students have been observed to be reluctant in seeking help for personal and psychological issues (Rickwood, Deanne, Wilson and Ciarrochi, 2005) perhaps due to fears related to confidentiality and embarrassment (Glasheen, 1998). A considerable amount of research has been conducted on students' help-seeking behavior in face-to-face classroom contexts for Butler, 1998; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Magnusson & Perry, 1992) but there are glaring gaps in knowledge regarding students choice of a help-giver particularly in the African context where boys have been socialized to seek less help as they may be viewed as weak leading to undue teasing and ridicule in the school.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a survey design to describe non-academic concerns and preferences of a help-giver among secondary school learners in Starehe Sub-county of Nairobi County. The design was selected because it enabled the researcher to generalize findings of a representative sample to that of the larger population from which it was drawn. The target population comprised all teachers and students in nine public secondary schools in Starehe Sub-county of Nairobi County. The schools were stratified into Day and Boarding and sample drawn using multi-stage technique. The questionnaire was the main tool of research. Items sought on a five-point Likert scale students non-academic concerns preferences of a help-giver in the school context. Validity was established by ascertaining the extent to which items were representative of the constructs of interest. Reliability was determined by use of the split-half technique.

6. Results and Discussion

In order to assess students' preferences of a help giver in Nairobi County, the task was subdivided into two objectives: establishing the nature of students' academic concerns within the context of the school for which help may be sought and, to find out their choice of a help-giver. Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they experienced learning-related issues in the classroom such as responding to assignments, feedback regarding answering questions in the classroom and study habits. Table 1 presents the distribution of participants' responses.

Table 1: Distribution of students' help-seeking needs

Concern	Responding to Homework		Feedback		Study Habits	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Always	101	37.84	98	34.02	92	31.94
Often	76	26.39	89	30.90	69	23.96
Sometimes	59	20.49	61	21.18	72	25.00
Rarely	39	13.54	35	12.15	37	12.85
Never	13	4.51	5	1.84	18	6.25
Total	288	100.00	288	100.00	288	100.00

Table 1 reveals that students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County often experienced concerns related to homework assignments as indicated by (64%), feedback from teachers and peers regarding homework assignments (65%) and 55% in regards to study habits. Sometimes students experienced difficulties in learning concepts, responding to classroom tasks to reinforce the concepts learned. The students also participate in learning by through hands-on, mouths-on and minds-on activities for which they receive feedback that may in some instances be demotivating and perhaps threaten their psychological wellbeing. This corroborates a study done by Kvaslund

(2000); Graham & Hill (2001) cited in Kanga (2017) that homework assignments and pressure to perform well hampered students' adjustments to the dynamic school environment.

Further, these findings are consistent with those of Ryan, Pintrich & Midgley (2001) who found that when students experienced issues in the learning process, they may overuse or avoid help when it is needed and this may lead to less effective learning. This also supports Nelson-Le Gall's theory that the student acknowledges that indeed they need to be helped since they lack resources exterior to themselves in resolving the issue.

The next objective of the study was to assess the learners' preferences of help givers in the school. When students experience academic-related issues in the school, they may move to the next level to seek help with a view to achieve personal effectiveness and reap the maximum benefits of learning. The study sought learners' preference of help-givers in academic-related issues from those available in the school such as teachers, classmates or the school chaplain. Table 2 presents participants responses.

Table 2: Distribution of students' responses on their choice of a help-giver in the School

Choice of help-giver Likelihood	Teacher in the school		Classmate		Chaplain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Extremely Unlikely	87	30.20	21	7.29	92	31.94
Unlikely	100	34.72	42	14.58	69	24.00
Undecided	56	19.44	37	12.85	63	21.88
Likely	45	15.62	125	43.40	42	14.58
Extremely likely	10	3.48	63	21.88	22	7.64
Total	288	100.00	288	100.00	288	100.00

From Table 2, 30.2% of students in Nairobi County were extremely unlikely to seek help from teachers while 34.72% of students were unlikely to seek help from teachers. However, 21.88% were likely to seek help from classmates and 43.40% likely to consult their peers on issues of academic nature. The school chaplain as a help-giver was preferred by 22% of students in the sub-county. This indicates that the teacher is the most unpopular help-giver for academic-related issues and the peer most preferred while the peer was the most preferred. This corroborates Kanga (2017) who viewed peers as bridges between the troubled student and the school counselor and may play an effective role in improving the students' adjustment to the ever changing school environment.

7. Recommendations

Psychological health is a critical consideration for effective learning. Students experience varied help-seeking needs in their endeavor to reap the maximum benefits

of the school. The study found that the teacher counsellors were not preferred as help givers and in the light of this, the study recommends the following:

- i) Inclusion of students' help-seeking behavior in academic activities in teacher preparation programmes.
- ii) Training of peer counsellors in public secondary schools in Nairobi as a strategy to improve learner's personal effectiveness.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that students in Nairobi County experienced academic concerns which affected their psychological wellbeing and hindered personal effectiveness. Students in public secondary schools in Nairobi were least likely to share their concerns with teachers but preferred peers with whom they had much in common. Training of peer counselors may be an alternative strategy to strengthen the provision of guidance and counseling services and promote the wellbeing of the students. This will go a long way in value addition to each learner and realization of Kenya's Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals on Education.

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