



An evaluation of the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in public universities in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Concerns have been raised over the increase of problems like drug abuse, alcoholism premarital sex, cheating in examinations and teenage pregnancies in Kenyan Public Universities. The study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. The Goal Setting Theory by Locke and Latham (1990) formed the theoretical framework for the study. The Study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample size comprised of 204 university students. It was found out that guidance and counselling services at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology were effective among students who sought the services. The study, however recommended that the guidance and counselling department should focus more on social, health and financial issues affecting students in the campus as well as exploring the influence of university enrolment and home oriented factors that may affect students and the stakeholders were encouraged to be involved in the process of guiding and counselling students.

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Introduction

The bases of guidance and counselling evaluation is to serve as a source for information on personal counselling, educational counselling, career development and placement to further education and work, in transitional stages of education (Whiston, 2003). According to Mutie & Ndambuki (2003), a student faces many difficult situations in life today. He/she has to make wise choices in curricular and other activities, acquire basic study skills for optimum achievement, and adjust to his/her peers, teachers and parents. He/she also has to live and share facilities in the institutions, hostels, dormitories, with individuals from different economic and social backgrounds.

The personal and social development of young university students' has become the responsibility of learning institutions to the extent that today such institutions require a more formal structure and explicit definition of responsibilities (Owino, 2005). Consequently, there is increasing concern for a more comprehensive and formally structured pastoral care and counselling programmes in the educational institutions. As an individual goes through the university, he/she encounters, at times, situations which required him/her to take correct and appropriate educational, vocational and social decisions. Given that learners spend more time in learning institution than at their homes, it is vital that schools and universities have well established and maintained guidance and counselling department (Owino, 2005).

Ssekemwa (1970) & Mbiti (1981) asserts that no human society has ever existed without its own system of education. Even the most primitive societies of the world today have a form of education system recognized by the society as a social institution through which knowledge, skills and attitudes are imparted to the youth. Hardoy (1993) on the other hand proposes that education should help an individual develop moral while Eshiwani (1993) argues that education has an additional

function; formation of social personalities. In view of these cotentions possible educational programmes that learners are exposed to in schools and the universities, guidance and counseling programmes are crucial and must be designed to meet these needs which include transmitting skills, knowledge norms and values (Owino 2005). This is supported by a body of evidence that demonstrate increasing levels of mental health disturbance and emotional distress among students which can be addressed through compressive and well structured guidance and counselling services (Rao, 2003). Similarly, the committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals also recognized this when they published their guidelines on student mental health policies and procedures for Higher Education (CVCP, 2000).

In response, to these pressures, all Kenyan universities counseling services have developed a variety of integrated approaches to meet institutional needs, apart from establishing working links with other local service providers such as 'I Choose Life (ICL)' group in Moi University. When one hears or is informed about university students in Kenya, what rings in one's mind is the numerous strikes sit-ins, boycotts and damages attributed to prior nasty experiences that Kenyans have witnessed among university students to the extent that some people have been made to believe that nothing good can come out of the university students. It is evident that the daily challenges that face university students in Kenya are, indeed numerous and diverse, some of them emanate from home, others from campus life, while others are as a result of the emotional turbulence characterized by this developmental stages. Despite all these, university students are expected to excel in their academic work in order to live a meaningful life in future. This study therefore sought to assess the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in the socio-emotional development of youth in Kenyan public universities.

A recent survey by the Association of University and College Counsellor (AUCC 2002) has revealed that all the public universities in Kenya have campus – based counselling services which provide a wide range of services from brief drop – in sessions through to longer – term therapeutic support. It is recognized that there are complex inter-relationships that require an effective guidance and counseling programmes. On the other hand, Amukoa (1984) & Khaemba (1986) posit that there has been little systematic attempt to establish guidance and counselling departments in Kenyan universities. These could deal adequately with the problems facing the university students. Due to lack of functional guidance and counselling units there has been an increase in indiscipline, rebellion and maladjustment among the youth in Kenyan public universities. Thus, concerns have been raised over the increase in problems like drug abuse, immoral behaviour, cheating in examination and unwanted pregnancies among others. Therefore, this study sought to evaluate how well established and functional are the guidance and counselling unit in public universities.

The study was grounded on the Goal Setting Theory proposed by Locke & Latham (1990). It contends that goal setting is an effective way of increasing motivation and performance. The basic postulate of the theory is that the intention to achieve a goal is a promising force for behaviour. Goal's direct both mental and physical actions of individuals. Secondly, goals increase peoples' effort towards certain activities while ignoring others. There are many programmes that are offered by guidance and counselling services in universities, but all of them may not be offered to learners because other academic and co-curricular activities must also be considered. Thirdly goals increase persistence because there is less temptation to quit once a goal has been established. If the goal of guidance and counselling is to solve relationship problems amongst learners, for example, they are likely to remain persistent as long as the problems remain (Owino 2005).

According to Locke & Latham (1990), feedback is important in making goal setting an effective motivating force. To be motivated there is need for a strong sense of the discrepancy between where one is and the desired state. Feedback helps to evaluate the progress of a programme so that if it has fallen short, then more effort or another strategy may be applied. Likewise, when feedback highlights accomplishment, confidence and analytic thinking performance is likely to improve. Goal setting theory is important in explaining how guidance and counseling unit can be established in a way that it effectively achieves it's set goals. The basic assumption of rationality theory is that, when decision – maker is confronted with several alternatives of a solution to a problem he has to weigh all the available alternatives on the basis of costs and benefits of each alternative before making decision.

Research methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was used to investigate the students rating of guidance and counseling, the type of guidance and counselling services offered at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. This design was found suitable because it gives an in-depth description of the phenomena in their existing setting and economical in collecting data from a large sample with high data turn over (Kothari, 2004). The study was conducted in Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. A public University situated in Kakamega Town of Western Province, Kenya. The University is located approximately at

longitude 34 degrees and 46 minutes East and Latitude 0 degrees and 16 minutes North along Kakamega-Webuye road.

The target population consisted of 1000 respondents (third and fourth year) students as per university registration at the time of the study. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling techniques were used. Simple random sampling was employed so that each member of the population had an equal chance of being picked and to have fair representation of all population characteristics in this study. To achieve a fair representation across the faculties, the study employed stratified sampling technique where by the participants were categorized according to faculties, gender and year of study. Thus, a total of 204 (102 male and 102 female) third and fourth year students were finally selected from all the faculties to participate in the study.

Data collection was by means of questionnaires. The questionnaire was semi-structured to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Quantitative responses based on Likert type scale were coded in the computer using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5. Quantitative data analysis was done to generate frequencies and percentages. The data collected through open ended questions was first classified on the basis of common attributes then tallied to obtain statistical frequencies, tabulated and finally analyzed using descriptive statistics. According to Kothari (2004), this helps to collapse large volume of qualitative data in numerical form for ease of statistical interpretation.

Results and discussions

The results of the findings are discussed in the subsequent subheadings.

Quality of the counseling services

Table 1 represents results of Student rating on the quality of counselling services. The results indicate that 148 (72.6%) respondents of the total sample rated the quality of counselling services as being satisfactory, 14.7% as average while only 27.4% as unsatisfactory. This implies that almost two third of the sampled students were happy with the counselling services. From this result it is suggestive that the university is offering high quality guidance and counselling services to the students. The study affirmed further that a similar number of males (74) and females (74) were of the view that counselling services offered to students are of high quality. This suggested that majority of the students in university appreciate the kind of counselling services provided by the guidance and counselling department. This also meant that the university guidance and counselling department embark on vigorous efforts to provide an effective and functional guidance and counselling services to students by employing trained counsellors and adopting flexible support services to the clientele. The results concur with AUCC (2002) observation that most universities in Kenya have campus – based counselling services in place where they provide a wide range of services ranging from brief drop – in sessions to longer – term therapeutic support.

Table 2 represents students rating on the quality of motivational talks planned by the university guidance and counselling department. From the Table, most of the respondents at 62.3% rated motivational talks on social issues as satisfactory (very good and good), 21.6% as average and 16.1% as unsatisfactory (poor and very poor). Higher number of female participants at 67.7% compared to their male (56.9%) counterparts found motivational talks organized by university

guidance and counselling department to be favourable. This meant that the motivational talks help to promote awareness and address emerging issues that challenge students' academic plight. Besides, it facilitates a wider knowledge on job market requirements and job hunting skills. The study corroborates the assertion made by Owino (2005) that guidance and counselling help to solve relationship problems amongst learners which may be persistent as long as the problem remains.

The results as shown in Table 3 reveal that 56% of the respondents rated career counselling services as being favourable, 30.4% as average and 14.6% rated unfavourable. The positive view of students towards career counselling services offered in university suggest that they benefit from the services particularly through annually organized career week open forum in MMUST. Nevertheless, a small proportion of students who showed negative approval of the career counselling services were probably influenced by the fact that they knew what career path to pursue and thus found it needless to seek the services. It could have been precipitated by lack of knowledge on the existence of career counselling services in the university. The finding further concur with Locke & Latham (1990), who were of the view that programmes offered by guidance and counselling departments assist students to overcome academic and career challenges.

Conclusions

Services offered at guidance and counselling department at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology are effective and satisfactory to the students who had sought them. Similarly, majority of students are positive towards motivational talks and career counselling services offered by the guidance and counselling department in the university. On average, the number of male and female students who seek counselling services on career issues is almost equal. A small fraction of respondents who participated in the study disapproved of the quality of counseling services being offered by the university guidance and counselling staff probably due to inadequate knowledge on the availability of such services in the university. However, this notwithstanding both male and female students had positive rating for counselling services offered in the university.

This study recommends the need for the shift of guidance and counselling department towards a holistic approach in assisting students with problems such as social, family, health and financial. The department should also broaden its functions in order to effectively render quality services to ever increasing student population and the complex issues. This could be done through enhanced training of peer educators and equipping the

counselling center with necessary electronic facilities to aid counselling.

The guidance and counselling department should come up with strategies, through consultation with students and other stakeholders, on how best to improve such services as motivational talks and seminars on social and educational issues. This may in the long run help address divergent issues affecting students. The guidance and counselling department should network with relevant professions with a viewing of improving on the guidance and counseling services.

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Table 1: Student rating on the quality of counseling services

Rating	V. Good	Good	Average	Poor	V. Poor
Male	41(40.2%)	33(32.4%)	13(12.8%)	8(7.8%)	7(6.8%)
Female	39(38.2%)	35(34.3%)	17(16.7%)	6(5.9%)	5(4.9%)
Average %	39.2	33.4	14.7	6.9	5.8

Source: Field Data

Table 2: Student rating on the quality of motivational talks

Rating	V. Good	Good	Average	Poor	V. Poor
Male	31(30.4%)	27(26.5%)	21(20.6%)	14(13.7%)	9(8.8%)
Female	34(33.4%)	35(34.3%)	23(22.5%)	6(5.9%)	4(3.9%)
Average %	31.9	30.4	21.6	9.7	6.4

Source: Field Data

Table 3: Student rating on the quality of career counseling services

Rating	V. Good	Good	Average	Poor	V. Poor
Male	26(25.5%)	33(32.4%)	27(26.5%)	11(10.7%)	5(4.9%)
Female	20(19.7%)	35(34.3%)	35(34.3%)	9(8.8%)	3(2.9%)
Average %	22.6	33.4	30.4	9.7	3.9

Source: Field Data