



Voices of Guidance Teachers in Secondary Schools of the Eastern Province of Zambia

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Abstract: *This study documents the voices of guidance and counselling teachers in selected secondary schools in the Eastern Province of Zambia. In order to document the voices of guidance and counselling teachers, a qualitative approach was employed using the descriptive research design. This approach was chosen in order to describe the experiences of the respondents from their own perspective. Structured interviews were used to collect data from 7 guidance and counselling teachers in 7 purposively selected secondary schools in Chipata district. The structural functionalism theory was used. The theory holds that each part of society functions in contribution to the overall function of the whole, in this case the school. The findings of the study were that guidance and counselling services are provided in schools and that the services are offered in some schools by teachers not specialised in guidance and counselling, lack of special rooms for counselling of students, and not having clear functional structures in schools thereby causing inadequacies in service delivery. The challenges had an effect on both the quality of services provided and the motivation of the guidance and counselling teachers. Recommendations were made to the Ministry of Education on the need to formalize guidance and counselling as one of the established departments in the schools so as to enhance effectiveness in service delivery.*

Keywords: *guidance and counselling, challenges, Eastern Zambia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Learners in schools face a myriad of challenges that affect their academic performance. Therefore, the guidance and counselling programme assists them to develop a positive self-image, a sense of identity, establish a belief system and values that shape their behaviour and actions (MESVTEE, 2013). Further, the challenges currently in the society facing the young and youths require a systematic and consistent effort to help them navigate the enormous and ever changing complex society. A study conducted by Onyango, Aloka and Raburu (2018) on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling in management of student behaviour in public secondary schools in Kenya was considered in this study. The study used the quantitative methods of data collection on a population of 431 teachers, 40 heads of guidance and counseling and 40 Deputy Principals. The findings of the study were that guidance and counselling was effective in behaviour management of students. This was in tandem with Dauenhauer's (2014) study in America and Nweze and Okolie's (2014) in Nigeria. The study also found that guidance and counselling was instrumental in reducing tension and strikes in schools. The primary data from respondents further shows that guidance and counselling was key in helping students realise their shortcomings as well as developing positive attitude towards school. However, the study did not bring out the challenges that the schools and guidance teachers faced in the provision of guidance and counselling services in the secondary schools researched. This is the gap that this study attempts to fill.

Guidance and counseling services are implemented with respect to individual differences of the recipients. This entails that psychological counseling places importance on confidentiality and the client's willingness to attend counseling. Further, in recognizing the writing of Makumba (2013), in the provision of guidance and counselling services, the student and his or her needs are at the centre. When providing support to students, counsellors work with the school administrators, fellow teachers, members of the community like parents in order to have a useful program. He further stated that other teachers did not favour guidance teachers to be detached from their offices but the argument has been

that all teachers have to be teaching and not to be confined to some offices. Such an understanding of the roles of guidance and counselling teachers leaves many appointed officers concentrating in class teaching while the guidance and counselling office remains unattended to. This leads to work overload that consequently makes guidance and counselling teachers not to attend to guidance and counselling work promptly and regularly.

Kauchak (2011) observed that working with the teachers and administrators is another service that is given by the counsellors. It is in the same line that MOE (1992) mentioned that it was the role of the guidance teachers in preparing hand-outs, pieces of training for the faculty or contacting outside experts to get consultation and training; preparing hand-outs or pieces of training for the parents about parenting related topics or inviting outside experts to do the training can be defined under these services. Nevertheless, schools fail to fully fund the guidance and counselling section or department hence some of the mentioned inefficiencies existing in schools.

Other studies conducted by Tuchili (2008) reveal observed that the areas that are common to most schools in Zambia needing guidance services include: school orientation programmes, growth and development programme, how to cope with bullying, how to cope with peer pressure, strategies for effective learning, transition to upper and senior grades, career guidance, conducting of government inventory interest test and social skills programmes. Other roles include teacher orientation and placement at the school level. Despite suggesting such huge tasks on the guidance and counselling teachers, schools have appointed teachers who are working in such offices without special consideration regarding allowances and special training. It is for this reason that there is inadequate service delivery and information leakage from such sensitive offices that should promote confidentiality.

The school just like any social unit is a complex system that needs to have all the parts working together for the promotion of the overall aims of education. Using thoughts from the structural function theory in sociology, the study interprets each department in school as a contributing unit to the success of educating the child. Haralambos and Holborn (2008) wrote that the structural functionalists view society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. : In this case, the study views guidance teachers and the department as one of the vital parts in the functioning of the whole school.

Mwanza (2021) discussed the various guidance services in boys only secondary schools in Eastern Province of Zambia that included information service like (literature displays, posters, talks, sensitizations), appraisal services, career guidance services, counselling and other referral works to help rehabilitate and improve the wellbeing of the learner. With this study, the challenge of the service provider in service delivery was not looked into. It is the aim of the study to highlight and document the challenges that the guidance teachers face in providing these services in secondary schools under two objectives.

- i. Investigate challenges faced in the process of providing guidance and counseling services in secondary schools.
- ii. Examine possible solutions to the challenges faced in the process of providing guidance and counselling.

2. METHOD AND TOOLS

The study was qualitative in nature and employed a descriptive research design because its focus was on describing the unheard voices of the guidance teachers in the secondary schools of Eastern Province. The study was conducted in seven secondary schools of Chipata district that were purposively sampled. 7 guidance teachers were purposively sampled because they were the ones dealing with the guidance and counselling matters in the schools. A qualitative data collection method was used. Mkandawire (2019:145) states, "*Qualitative data collection methods are those strategies used to collect information based on subjective assessment of opinions, behaviour, attitudes, and social interactions.*" It should be noted that the common qualitative data collection methods include interviews, focus group discussion, observation, questionnaire, and document analysis. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018: 469) identified eight main kinds of data collection instruments with many variants included in each: "questionnaires, interviews, observations, tests, personal constructs,

role plays, visual media, using secondary data...” This study however used in-depth interviews to collect data from the guidance and counselling teachers. Thematic analysis was used to understand the meaning of the data. This was done through data coding that resulted into creating specific themes after coding under which findings were presented.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents established that there was no favourable time for the guidance teachers to offer classroom-based guidance services well without disturbing teaching time because guidance was not on the school's formal timetable. Few teachers of other subjects were able to let go of their timetabled teaching time for guidance activities as they were mostly geared to cover their subject content. One respondent said:

“The challenge was that teachers and administrators constitute the greatest obstacle to the success of guidance and counselling services in schools. There is a negative attitude of school authorities on guidance services and counsellors in particular and also about the relevance of guidance services in schools.”

The study further established that some schools are conservative on the structure of the school that did not show the position of a guidance teacher on the formal hierarchy of the school as such even representation in school management meetings was through the head of department of the Social Sciences Department. The Social Sciences Head of Department was in charge of a number of subjects like geography, civic education, religious education, history and social studies. Therefore, adding guidance and counselling issues would overwhelm them. This kind of bureaucracy delays work progress even on matters that needed urgency.

A respondent reacted that:

“The school counsellor is seen as a new innovation to the school system which is still being regarded with some sense of suspicion, caution and distancing. Some of the administrators and teachers regard the services of the counsellors as an unnecessary fitting in the school trying to find relevance”

Another respondent bemoaned the lack of support from the school administration and said the following:

“I find it difficult to work with some school administrators who have less appreciation on the need for the guidance teacher to be relieved of heavy teaching load and other co-curricular duties. Such administrators deliberately block the counselors’ work by denying allocation of funds for guidance services; some are not flexible and would not welcome new ideas”.

What this respondent said is in line with what Boitt (2016) wrote that the success of guidance and counselling services require the support of stakeholders, administrators, staff, students and the community. Guidance services are part of the school system and cannot fully be appreciated where there is minimal support from the school. It is therefore imperative that a health relationship is built between the guidance and counselling teacher and the school system.

The respondent further said,

“... administrators are aware that schools require the services of a trained counsellor, they deliberately avoid implementing some of the guidance services in the school that historically... operated successfully without formal guidance services.”

The other challenge was that there were less individual (one on one) counselling cases for the boys in the school as reported by a respondent who lamented that:

“... female students were good in interpersonal relationships, self disclosure, and openness than male students who are seen to be rigid and reserved in their relationships, hence cannot interact often with the guidance counsellors nor seek their services effectively.”

Cultural factors may be attributed to this assertion, where boys are raised to take on a tough and strong position. Yet the boys are usually more likely to abuse drugs than girls as a result of

psychosocial and mental health problems they are going through. An indication that though they were perceived to be strong, and could keep problems to themselves, they could not stand the mental and psychosocial pressures. Other than cultural influences being a factor, the guidance office may need to do a lot of sensitization on its role and function in the school system so as to be appreciated by all the students.

Another respondent said:

“Guidance and counselling services were a new thing in school. There are not enough qualified counsellors in schools and other educational institutions. However, there is a limited quantity of qualified counsellors; they are either not functioning in schools or are engaged in other activities rather than what they are trained for. Some of the school guidance counsellors are also teachers of other subjects and they are fully occupied with teaching responsibilities.”

Other than having teaching subjects that are on the time table in school, guidance teachers are expected to register learners for examinations (internal; both junior and school certificate candidate, external that is the general certificate of examination), run and supervise national exams, do analysis of the exam results, issue the same results and attend to the needs of the learners. The time to attend to the needs of the learners seem to suffer as in most cases the guidance teacher is found with examinations deadlines to meet.

Financial challenges in most schools spread to a lot of departments and need areas of teaching and learning including development of teaching materials. The findings of the study revealed that teachers planned for a specific budget to procure materials to use during guidance and counselling meetings yet funding was not adequately done for the programmes. The participants attested to this:

“We planned to make many sensitization materials for the school targeting specific trends in the social behaviour of learners. We were only told during the meeting that the materials were not bought, our efforts to address the emerging issues were halted and we were made to think in other terms”

The findings of the study revealed that teachers and school administrators could work to raise planned specific budgetary allocations to fund guidance services in cases where budgetary allocations from the central government were not sufficient. This could cause the teachers to feel supported by administrators. Guidance teachers together with school administrators would work collaboratively on initiatives that would help to fund guidance related activities like tours to higher institutions of learning for learners in order to aid career decisions and information gatherings. Such initiatives would encourage the guidance teachers and the learner development.

Another finding of the study indicated that some schools did not have facilities where they could conduct individual counselling. The counselling was mostly done in the same office or room that was being shared by several other assigned guidance teachers and was not supporting the ethics of confidentiality. Most students expressed displeasure at this practice, as their matters were not treated with the expected standards in counselling. One respondent said:

“It has become a challenge to keep the confidential records of student counselling in an open office where several officers have access and also to conduct a successful session with a student before someone comes in looking for a certificate or other information.”

Deliberate infrastructure development or allocation in some cases was needed to address the challenge of schools not having facilities that encourage individual counselling. Like any other specialized service in school, the guidance and counselling services need a room for the counsellor to operate from.

Another respondent mentioned that:

“some parents were uncooperative and were seen to be an obstacle to the provision of guidance and counselling services in the school. Parents avoided forums where their children’s` private, career and domestic issues were discussed with teachers including school open days.”

To try to reduce the issue of uncooperative parents some respondents echoed that school administrators, Teachers and Parents' Associations needed to carry out sensitization to inform and educate all stakeholders on the need to work together for the benefit of the child. MOE (1992) highlighted similarly that it was the role of guidance teachers in preparing pieces of training for the parents about parenting related topics or inviting outside experts to do the training where need be.

The other challenge was lack of literature to use as a reference for most of the work done in guidance and counselling service provision. One respondent said:

“There is no standard literature that I can refer to in most of my work. I have been doing guidance work for so long but have never come across syllabi or textbook that can be used as a reference even when handling classroom-based activities.”

The challenge of literature to use as a reference for most of the work and activities in guidance as suggested by one respondent required active participation from both the guidance teachers and the curriculum developers. Scholars and educationists needed to take interest in writing standard literature that teachers could refer to in most of the guidance work, seeing that most of the work done was purely from college and university study manuals contextualized in some schools.

On the other hand, other schools had some booklets provided by the Ministry of Education on the Management and Administration of Guidance and Counselling in the Education System, Books on Career Guidance Services in Schools, and a Guidance and Counselling Teachers Guide. However, these materials were not adequate to cater for all guidance teachers in schools. With such evidence of official books in some schools, it can be concluded that guidance teachers needed to take an active role in trying to ensure they had a copy of the basic literature available to guide and inform their practice.

On the issue of recognition and grading of the guidance qualifications the following responses from the respondents were established and tabulated.

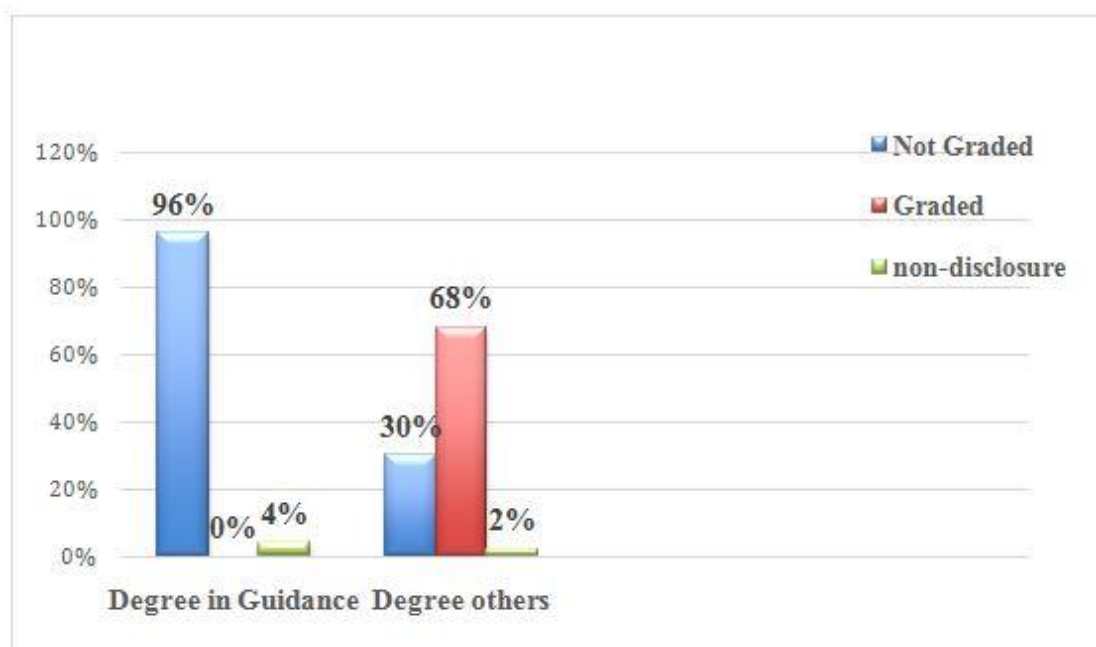


Figure1. Recognition and Salary Grading

Data from fieldwork, 2021

It was seen from the tabulated figures that about 96% of the respondents who have formal degrees in guidance and counselling in schools were not graded as degree holders as such were not paid according to their qualifications. Those with degrees in specialized subjects on the other hand, mostly had their degrees graded or awaiting to be graded.

The respondents attested to that and said that in some schools guidance and counselling was seen as just one of those committees in the school system where members of the committee would annually be changed by administrators there by creating a deficit in consistency and professional development.

The shortfalls created in the long run would fail to make the guidance and counselling office as a vital unit that should contribute to the success of the whole school; as each unit is expected to add to the function of the whole school. Another respondent added that;

‘...the structure in our Ministry does not have established positions at the district and school level specific for guidance work. The provincial office has a Senior Education Officer Guidance and Administration but there are no positions at the lower structures to fully support and utilize guidance and counselling functions as a result in schools these are seen to be committees that can be shuffled at the pleasure of school administrators.’

4. CONCLUSION

In summary it can be concluded that, though this study was qualitative in nature, whose findings cannot be generalised, guidance and counselling was facing a number of challenges in the schools studied. This is similar to what Makumba (2013) argued, that guidance services from the literature reviewed globally in his study, were provided with challenges. This assertion holds true even for this study that the listed number of challenges impacted negatively on the implementation of the guidance and counselling programme. The established challenges in this study included inadequate time, lack of parental support, shortage of qualified guidance and counselling staff, unrecognized and ungraded trained staff in guidance, heavy workload, unsupportive school administration, inadequate finances and other facilities and lack of administrative guidance and counselling structures in schools. This study has opened a way for further research to find out if what is happening in the 7 sampled schools in Eastern Province, is what is happening in most of the schools in the Province or at national level.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above research findings, the following recommendations have been made: firstly, the Ministry of Education at province, and district levels should consider enforcing the minimum teaching workload for guidance teachers who are tasked with other subject teaching loads so that they concentrate on guidance and counselling service delivery.

Secondly, considerations would include making the guidance and counselling office as an independent department to enhance communication and effectiveness, unlike the current trend where the section is under the Department of Social Sciences.

And thirdly, the Teaching Council of Zambia Qualifications Authority and Ministry of Education should work together to recognise the degree in guidance and counselling and upgrade teachers' salary scales accordingly. Without these challenges being addressed, the impact on the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes will continue being felt thereby demotivating the officers charged with this task.

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