

Abstract

The main focus of this study was to investigate teachers and students' perspectives on the hiring of school counselors in public secondary schools particularly at Ilala Municipality. The main purpose of this was to explore the perspectives of teachers and students on the hiring of school counselors in public secondary schools as the strategy toward enhancing effective counselling service provision in schools. Specifically, the study was set to:

- Establish the counselling needs and the way they are managed in public secondary schools
- Explore the perspectives of teachers on hiring of school counselors in public secondary schools
- Examine the perspectives of students on hiring of school counselors in public secondary schools

This study was guided by Humanistic theory as propounded by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Nevertheless, perspectives of Carl Rogers which developed in the 1940s appear more relevant for explaining the essentials of counseling for personal growth. The core perspective of the theory was that, human beings have an inherent self-actualising tendency while struggling towards developing ones' capacities that may serve to maintain and enhance the individual.

The study employed the qualitative approach to investigate the perspectives of teachers and students on the hiring of school counselors. This approach falls under the constructivism and interpretivism philosophical assumptions on the existence of multiple realities and social construction of meanings about a certain phenomenon and individual experiences. This approach was suitable as it deliberately focused on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the human participants in their natural setting.

The study employed a *phenomenological* research design in the process of generating data. The design is believed to be effective in capturing the experiences and observations of situations by individuals from their own perspectives. Phenomenological design is used to describe the meanings of many individuals' life experiences, of a concept or phenomenon. The phenomenon under this study was the impacts of available counseling services.

The study was conducted in five public secondary schools selected from Ilala municipality in Dar es Salaam. Despite the fact that the systems of rendering counseling services are similar in all public schools in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam is one of the regions in which most recent studies done on counseling provision revealed inadequacy of the services provided. The reasons of inadequacy were associated with the services provided by para-professional counselors. This rationalized a need to investigate perspectives of teachers and students on hiring of qualified school counselors as an

approach that would lead to the availability of adequate and relevant counseling services.

The study involved community secondary schools located in the city centre and those located in the peripheral; single sex schools (boys' only schools and girls only schools) and boarding school. Moreover, to capture the experiences from all levels of secondary school concurrently, the characteristic of sampled schools to have both ordinary and advanced levels were added. Thereafter, from each sub-category, one school was selected to form a sample so as to gather experiences and perspectives from diversities of school types and characteristics in the research site. Hence, five public high schools were drawn for the study, where school A represented boarding schools, school B peripheral schools, school C single sex 'girls only' schools, school D single sex 'boys only' schools, and school E city centre schools.

Purposive sampling was used to select teacher counselors, head of schools, and class teachers who by virtue of their position at school were the one assigned to engage in monitoring the moral behaviors and resolving maladjusted behaviors as directed by SSMT and Education Circular No. 11. The selection of such group of teachers was based on the criterion that those teachers were highly experienced and engaged in solving students' social and academic challenges and problems in different ways. Moreover, the document directing heads of schools "*Kiongozi cha Mkuu wa Shule*" and SSMT which prescribe on guidance and counseling services specifically for head of schools, teacher counselors and class teachers were reviewed. Students were involved because they were the recipients of either positive or negative effects of counseling services provided in the schools.

The total sample size 74 participants, including 4 Heads of schools, 10 teacher counselors, 10 class teachers, and 50 students from five selected schools. In this study, two methods of data collection were used.

- Semi-structured interview
- Focus group discussion

The study used six steps in analysing and interpreting data

- Familiarisation with data by reading the interview and focus group discussion transcripts, take notes and formulating ideas for coding
- Generation of the initial codes

- Searching for themes
- Reviewing and refining the themes
- Defining and naming the themes.
- Production of report Regarding the counseling needs and services at schools, it was found that;

- There is a prevailing state of variety of issues that need effective counseling services from the qualified counselor. Such issues included related socio-emotional challenges, lack of self-determination among students, early sexual behavioural practices, panic and generalized anxiety, learning difficulties, subject selection and career choices.

- In so far, as the engagement of teachers in solving such challenges, the study found that teachers tried to resolve some challenges; however, the other issues remain complex and critical, thus they were only superficially resolved. Moreover, the services given seemed to orient more towards guidance.

Regarding the perspectives of teachers on the hiring of school counselors;

- It was found that there were varied perspectives among teachers on the importance of qualified school counselors to be hired for counseling services in schools. There were teachers with positive perspectives while others had negative perspectives on the hiring of school counselors. However, teachers with positive perspectives were comparatively more than those with negative perspectives. The categorical factors toward positive perspectives include: the need for professionalism, the magnitude of students' problems, level of trust among students, need of proactive interventions, and accountability in counseling and multiple dimensions of counselor's roles. On the other hand, the categorical factors include: familiarity and few responsibilities of school counselors, nature of children, and prospective conflict of interest between school teachers and school counselors.

Regarding the perspectives of students on the hiring of school counselors;

- The study found that in all five focus group discussions from different selected schools, all students participated in the study had positive attitudes towards the hiring of school counselors. However, they varied on the perspectives towards favorability/preference of a need for school counselors to be hired in schools. The factors supporting a need for hiring of the school counselors included: insufficiency of current counseling services, trustworthiness, adequate exploration of problems, accessibility of life skills lessons and mental health, promotion of academic performance and career prosperity.

Conclusions

- Students have been encountering various challenges in their schools which necessitate high demand of counseling services. In response to the prevailing situation, schools have been using teacher

counselors to address students' needs. However, the preferred traditional approaches to students counseling needs have been described as inadequate to cover up students' needs. Thus, on the basis of these findings the need to hire qualified counselors becomes a significant agenda to address currently and in future.

- Some teachers declined from buying the idea of hiring qualified counselors due to their personal reasons which were not in favour of the students who in this case were clients. Generally, the majority of school teachers who addressed the question of hiring qualified counselors in professional manner bought the idea, but those who viewed it as a threat and a challenge to them remained standing against it for personal reasons.
- Lastly, students' perspectives were generally consistent and emphasized on the need for qualified school counselors to be hired. This implies that the current counseling services are rarely offered in relative to students' needs. The raised factors for that were lack of trustworthiness, insufficient time for problem exploration, access to mental health skills and career prosperity.

Recommendations

- The schools need to have qualified counselors who can address counseling issues adequately with skills and approaches possessed. The government may hire and allocate qualified counselors starting from the ward level to serve schools of that particular ward. However, this could depend on the availability of fund in the education budget.
- Decisions or professional issues should be professionally addressed. This is based on the fact that teachers' perspectives are highly been interfered with some personal issues, hence caused variations. Therefore, a change of mind set among teachers can be helpful to make them address issues professionally.

Further research

There is a need for a correlational study on the comparison between qualified counselors and para-professional counselors in order to provide empirical evidence on the relative differences between the two. That would rationalize the necessity or otherwise, of the need to have qualified counselors in schools.