

Status of counselling services in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone, Anseba Region, Eritrea

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess status of counselling services in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone, Anseba region, Eritrea. The research was anchored on Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura. The study used convergent parallel mixed method research design. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect the data. A sample of 306 students, 20 teachers, 5 head masters, 5 teacher counsellors were used for this study. Systematic sampling, simple random and purposive sampling were used to select the schools and the participants. The validity and reliability of the instruments was guaranteed by piloting and Cronbach Alpha technique. Data gathered through questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistical techniques involving frequencies, percentages and means. The results were then presented using tables, pie charts and bar graphs. Data gathered through interview guides were analysed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions. The findings of the study showed that counselling was minimally used in the secondary schools in Keren subzone. Majority of students, 57.6% and teachers, 75% reported that their schools did not have counselling service.

Key words: Counselling services, status, students, counsellor, teacher, head teachers.

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1. Introduction and background

In recent years, school-based counselling has become increasingly recognised by national governments across the globe as a legitimate activity to support and enhance students' journey through the compulsory years of education. Counselling is also being recognised by many states in the world in the role it plays in curbing students discipline in secondary schools around the world. The number of academic papers that are being written on school-based counselling in different countries and regions attests to the importance of counselling (Harris, 2014).

A study conducted in Australia by Sawyer et al. (2012), found out that counselling services are provided in primary and secondary schools, although the way this is organised varies across states, and may also include provision for kindergarten age children. In Australia, child and adolescent mental health is a serious problem that in turn disrupts learning and teaching process. The counselling services in Australian schools seek to improve student discipline and overall mental health of students. Cooper (2013) conducted a study on current provision of school-based counselling in across the United Kingdom and used desk research method by analysing annual reports and minutes of meetings. The study found out that provision of school-based counselling is inconsistent in different regions of the Kingdom.

African nations are in a hurry to educate citizens in order to modernise and enhance their social, economic and political development. The concept of guidance and counselling although relatively new in Africa has been embraced by most developing nations with enormous enthusiasm. This is because counselling is being regarded by most nations as an educational service through which efficient manpower for development can be attained (Denga, 2016).

Alutu (2015) carried out a study on the state of counselling services in secondary schools in Edo state, Nigeria. The study found out that out of the 96 public schools in Benin City, only 25 have at least a practicing counsellor. Sophie, Ndhlovu and Phiri (2013) carried out a study in Zambia on the status of guidance and counselling services in schools. Their study found out that, out of 858 pupils who participated in the study, 628 (73.2%) indicated that guidance and counselling services were available in their schools. Similarly, out of the 52 teachers who participated in the study, 39 (75%) of them indicated that guidance and counselling services were available in their schools.

Wambu and Fisher (2015) explored the current status of counselling services in school in Kenya. They found out that despite the government's emphasis on guidance and counselling program implementation in Kenyan schools and a rapid increase in the number of trained school counsellors, lack of standardised training curriculums, ethical standards, counselling models and role ambiguity persist.

Wako (2016) researched in Ethiopia in order to assess the status of guidance and counselling services and challenges in addressing psychosocial and academic problems in selected secondary schools at Sidama Zone, Ethiopia. The study revealed that majority of students were not utilising school guidance and counselling services properly to be successful in their academic life mainly due to lack of awareness about the service in their school, weak link between school counsellors and school community. Other problems for underutilisation of the service are related with professional competencies of the school counsellors, lack of policy direction about the service and administrative problems.

In Eritrean secondary schools, Guidance and Counselling services were commenced to cater for students with social, personal, psychological, educational and vocational problems. It was also introduced to assist teachers in managing student discipline issues (MoE, 2002). A handbook or a manual to train teachers on Guidance and Counseling for school Guidance and Counseling providers was produced in 2005 and many teachers in high school were trained as trainers to train their peers in different high schools (MoE, 2013). According to the report of UNICEF (2010), 300 peer educators were trained to provide support to an estimated 16,487 students in solving daily life problems, and 2,292 teachers were trained to promote guidance and counselling services in secondary schools.

Not many studies here focused on investigating the status of counselling services in Eritrean schools. Since there was scarcity of information and limited data available locally in Eritrea, this study thought to investigate the status of counselling services in Keren subzone secondary schools.

2. Research methodology

The study used convergent parallel mixed method research design. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect the data. Questionnaire was given to teachers and students, whereas interview guide was administered to head teachers and teacher counsellors. A sample of 306 students, 20 teachers, 5 head masters, 5 teacher counsellors were used for this study. Systematic sampling, simple random and purposive sampling were used to select schools and the participants. The validity and reliability of the instruments was guaranteed by piloting and Cronbach Alpha technique. Data gathered through questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistical techniques involving frequencies, percentages and means. The results were then presented using tables, pie charts and bar graphs. Data gathered through interview guides were analysed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Status of counselling services in secondary schools in Keren Sub-Zone

From Table 1, student were asked whether their school had counselling service, at the same time they were asked if they have ever attended counselling and if they did, how often they attended.

Table 1. Availability of counselling services in school, students' attendance of counselling services and frequency of counselling attendance by students

Type of Schools	Availability of counselling services in schools			Students' attendance of counselling services			
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Private schools	<i>f</i>	56	19	75	40	35	75
	%	74.7	25.3	27.7	53.3	46.7	27.7
Public Schools	<i>f</i>	59	137	196	73	123	196
	%	30.1	69.9	72.3	37.2	62.8	72.3
Total	<i>f</i>	115	156	271	113	158	271
	%	42.4	57.6	100.0	41.7	58.3	100.0
Frequency of counselling attendance in relation to gender of respondents (<i>N</i> = 113)							
Gender	<i>N</i> (113)	Percent (%)		Mean		SD	
Male	34	30.1		3.64		2.177	
Female	79	69.9		2.75		1.445	
Total	113	100		3.01		1.732	

f: frequency, %: percentage, SD: standard deviation.

As shown in Table 1, most (74.7%) of the private students were aware their schools had counselling services. However, majority (69.9%) of the public school students were not aware that their schools had counselling services. Overall majority, 57.6% of students were not aware their schools had counselling services. Regarding attendance of counselling services by the students, most (53.3%) private school students had attended the counselling services, while only 37.2% of the public students attended the counselling services. In relation to gender and counselling services attendance, 69.9% of those who had attended the counselling services were female students. However, of those who had

attended the counselling services, male students had higher rate of attendance than their female counterparts.

The results are clear indication that counselling services are not to the level of the expected standards. This result corresponds to the findings of Wako (2016) states that the majority of students in Ethiopian schools did not attend school counselling services properly; hence, it affects their behaviour and discipline in school. Similarly Sophie et al. (2013) in their study in Zambia found out that 72% of students in private schools indicated that their school had a counselling service, whereas 53% of public students indicated that their school has counselling services.

Findings from the qualitative analysis as reported by head teachers from public schools showed that there are no formal offices for counselling services; however, counselling services are provided through student affairs office. Although there were higher awareness and attendance level of counselling services among private students, the school counsellors from the private schools reported that there were inadequate resources in running the counselling services effectively. Therefore, the results of the current study showed that the status of counselling service in Keren subzone secondary schools was very low and lacked the basic facilities.

Table 2. Availability of counselling services in schools according to teachers

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	4	25
No	12	75
Total	16	100

According to teachers, most (75.0%) revealed that their schools did not have counselling services. Only 25% of the respondent teachers said their school had counselling services. This finding correlates with the students' response that majority (57.6%) had reported their respective schools had no counselling service. The results in Table 2 are clear indication that counselling services are not well established in schools in Keren subzone. The current study is similar with Arfasa and Weldmeskel, (2018) finding that revealed almost all the secondary schools in South West Ethiopia did not have guidance and counselling services. Among selected 18 secondary schools, only 8 secondary schools have counselling centres. Among secondary schools having counselling centre, only four secondary schools have psychology background personnel, while in remaining schools counselling officers were from different fields of study. Also, Comfort (2013) reported that on evaluation of the status of guidance services in secondary schools in rivers state, Nigeria show that, out of the secondary schools in the state the majority did not have a counselling centre. It is very clear that from the findings of the current study majority of schools in Keren subzone did not have counselling services and those that have it did not have trained counselors and proper offices for counselling purposes.

3.2. Status of counselling services according to students and teachers respondents

Table 3 shows student responses on current status of counselling services in schools in Keren subzone.

Table 3. Status of counselling services in schools students' response

		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Our school has counselling office	<i>f</i>	46	38	10	82	95
	%	17	14	3.7	30.3	35.1
Our school has counselling services	<i>f</i>	47	90	25	31	78
	%	17.3	33.2	9.2	11.4	28.8
Counselling is part of curriculum	<i>f</i>	94	64	20	33	60
	%	34.7	23.6	7.4	12.2	22.1
Our school has peer counselling programs	<i>f</i>	32	64	42	65	68
	%	11.8	23.6	15.5	24	25.1
Our school has group counselling programs	<i>f</i>	13	78	47	64	69
	%	4.8	28.8	17.3	23.6	25.5
Our school has individual counselling sessions for students	<i>f</i>	31	53	40	45	102
	%	11.4	19.6	14.8	16.6	37.6
Our school has enough counselling resources	<i>f</i>	40	54	40	48	89
	%	14.8	19.9	14.8	17.7	32.8

f: frequency, %: percentage.

In relations to the status of counselling, Table 3 shows that 35.1 % of the respondents strongly disagreed that their school had counselling office. In a similar way, 28.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed that counselling service were available. However, 17.3% and 33.2% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that their school had counselling services. Therefore, the result of the current study confirms that the availability of counselling services is very low in Keren subzone secondary schools. Head teacher 1 confirmed the results of students by saying, *'I can grade the status of counselling in my school as fair, though we don't have formal office and a trained counsellor, our school is trying its best to apply the services to manage students' discipline'*.

The findings show that most (34.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that counselling is a part of the curriculum which was also reflected by 37.5% of the teachers' respondents. The majority (35.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed the school has counselling office which also appears in school has individual counselling sessions for students (37.6%) and there are enough counselling resources (32.8%). This was replicated by the majority (37.5%) of teachers respondents as well.

The findings of the currents study show that despite counselling being a part of the curriculum most schools do not have counselling offices, peer and group counselling, individual counselling services. The schools do not have sufficient resources to effect counselling in their schools. In turn, the absence of crucial counselling services materials and programs affects students discipline in schools. These results are no different from the findings of Alutu (2015) who carried out a study in the state of counselling services in Edo state, Nigeria and found out that out of 96 schools in Benin city, only 25 schools have a practicing counsellor even though most were untrained. Counselling services are faced with many difficulties, such as lack of proper funding, lack of basic counselling material, trained counsellors and proper offices. In addition, Wako (2016) in a study conducted in Ethiopia found out that schools lacked basic counselling facilities, such as proper office and resources. The findings also indicated that group counselling and peer counselling were almost non-existent.

Table 4. Status of counselling services in schools teacher response

		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Our school has counseling office	<i>f</i>	2	2	4	3	5
	%	12.5	12.5	25.0	18.8	31.3
Our school has counseling services	<i>f</i>	2	3	4	5	2
	%	12.5	18.8	25.0	31.3	12.5
Counseling is part of curriculum	<i>f</i>	6	4	4	0	2
	%	37.5	25.0	25.0	0	12.5
Our school has peer counselling programs	<i>f</i>	0	2	5	4	5
	%	0	12.5	31.3	25.0	31.3
Our school has group counselling programs	<i>f</i>	0	3	3	6	4
	%	0	18.8	18.8	37.5	25.0
Our school has individual counselling sessions for students	<i>f</i>	2	2	4	7	1
	%	12.5	12.5	25.0	43.8	6.3
Fully equipped counselling room/office is available	<i>f</i>	0	2	4	4	6
	%	0	12.5	25.0	25.0	37.5
There is enough counselling resources	<i>f</i>	2	2	2	6	4
	%	12.5	12.5	12.5	37.5	25.0

f: frequency, %: percentage.

As shown in Table 4, 31.3% of teachers respondents strongly disagree that their school has counselling office, while 25.0% were undecided whether their school has counselling office. Only small percent of teacher respondents that is 12.5% strongly agree their school has counselling services, whereas most of them that is 25% were undecided and 31.3% disagreed their school has counselling services. From the qualitative analysis, teacher counsellor 2 confirms the response of teachers by saying, 'If I am to evaluate the status of counselling services in my school, I would say it is less than the expected standard. Lack of formal office and huge class size of students makes counselling very difficult task'.

A high number of the respondents 37.5% and 25% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that counselling was a part of curriculum. Despite counselling being a part of school curriculum, 31.3% respondents strongly disagreed that their school has peer counselling and 37.5% disagreed there was group counselling service. In a similar way, 43.8% disagreed that there were individual counselling sessions, and 25% were undecided whether there was individual counselling session in their school. A big number, 37.5% of respondents strongly disagreed that there was fully equipped counselling room. In a similar way, 37.5% disagreed there were enough counselling resources. It is noteworthy that there was no single respondent who strongly agreed that their school had fully equipped counselling room. Therefore, the result shows that the states of counselling in secondary schools in Keren subzone are very poor. Since the service is not fully functioning, it has very low effect on student discipline. Such results are reflected in the findings of Salgong, Ngumi and Chege (2016). In relation to the status of guidance and counselling in Kenyan schools, their findings showed that 33.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed that guidance and counselling was available in the schools. In a similar vein, 60% of the respondents strongly disagreed that counselling facilities are available in secondary schools. From the foregoing, it is evident that counselling services lack the required resources in enhancing student discipline in school. Specifically, counselling facilities, individual counselling rooms and fully equipped office need to be looked into critically.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that the current status of counselling services in Keren secondary schools was below the expected standards. According to the findings of the current study, the status of counselling services was poor in Keren secondary schools. Private schools had a better attendance level compared to public schools in terms of attending counselling services. In over all, female students attended counselling services more than male students. The study revealed that the status of counselling service in Keren secondary schools was poor. Majority of students, 57.6% and 75% of the teachers reported that their schools did not have counselling service. However, there was a difference between private and public school students on awareness about the availability of counselling services. In private schools 74.7% of the students revealed that they were aware of the presence of counselling service, whereas only 30.1% of public students were aware about the availability of counselling service. In terms of attending counselling services, majority, 58.3% of the students did not attend counselling services. Although there were higher awareness and attendance level of counselling services among private students, the school counsellors from the private schools reported that there were inadequate resources in running the counselling services effectively.

The finding from the qualitative data revealed that head teachers and teacher counselors evaluated the status of counselling services in Keren secondary schools as poor and fair. They reported that schools did not have counselling offices and properly trained counselors for the purpose of counselling.

5. Recommendations

The ministry of education should revise the curriculum for secondary school education so that to incorporate a well-functioning counselling service. From the findings of the current study, it came out clearly that counselling services though present in the national curriculum it is not practiced by majority of the schools and the little that is available is also practiced by unqualified and untrained teachers who head other offices as their prime responsibility. The ministry of education should ensure that counselling services are provided by qualified and trained counselors so that it assists in managing students' discipline.

In addition, the ministry of education should come out with clear guide and policy on how to implement counselling services in schools. The current study made it very clear that no school has a separate room for counselling service, which makes it very difficult to teacher counselors to provide counselling services to students. The Keren sub-zone quality assurance office need to ensure that set policies are dully followed to standard in secondary schools in Keren sub-zone.

School head teachers being the highest managers in schools should create a conducive atmosphere for counselling process to happen so as to assist students in managing discipline. From the findings of the current study it is evident that the current status of counselling services in Keren secondary schools is in its lowest level, due to that reason students are not using it.

Students should be encouraged and motivated by their teachers to attend counselling services in order to assist students in managing their discipline in schools. The environment in secondary schools should allow for free and open interaction between students, teachers and teacher counselors. The finding of the study indicated that students feel shy to attend counselling service and counsellors were not friendly.

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