

EFFICACY OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL AND PERSONAL COMPETENCIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Students' in higher learning institutions experience challenges and complexities of everyday living which leave many of them devastated, not able to make realistic choices. The acquisition of social and personal competencies can assist students cope and fit to the university set up. These competencies shape and influence students' behaviour. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of guidance and counselling services on the development of University students' social and personal competencies. The study employed *ex post facto* casual – comparative design. Quantitative data was collected by use of a questionnaire that was administered to 369 third and fourth year full-time undergraduate students enrolled in three public and three private universities in Kenya. In addition, qualitative data was collected through an interview conducted among student counsellors and a focus group discussion involving thirty peer counsellors from the universities studied. T- test was used to test the significance and determine whether to reject or accept the study hypotheses. Results indicated significant differences in efficacy of guidance and counselling services on development of social and personal competencies between students enrolled in public and private universities. This showed that effective guidance and counselling services in private universities, to a significant extent enhanced better growth in students competencies than those enrolled in public universities. The study recommended that the university authorities need to establish clear policies that would improve and strengthen guidance and counselling services to make them effective for the attainment of students' social and personal competencies.

Key words: Counselling, Efficacy, Guidance, Students, Social and Personal competencies

INTRODUCTION

University education is generally based on the philosophy that students are mature enough to take the fullest responsibility for their behaviour. There is the understanding that university education helps students acquire knowledge, skills and values that enhance self-management. Frank and Karyn (2005) argue that, although university undergraduate students are young adults, most of them

remain in a suspended state of semi- immaturity and dependence, compared with persons of the same age who do not go to college but begin careers. Thus, the need for guidance and counselling services in institutions of higher learning cannot be overstated. Globally, it is evident that students in educational institutions have needs that call for guidance and counselling services which if unattended could lead to numerous disciplinary issues and wastage. Students in educational institutions search, quite ardently for values that would give meaning to life after training. The students become disenchanted when they have difficulty relating their education to the rest of their lives. Guidance and counselling services are, therefore, definitely very crucial in the universities. These services need to be rendered in the best way possible in order to help students cope with modern life complexities and the various challenges that may affect their development of social and personal competencies. It appears that total and enlightened commitment on the part of the university policy and decision makers is necessary for the counselling services to be effective.

Social guidance and Counselling services helps students to develop the right ideals and conduct for living in a socially useful manner. According to Melgosa (2005) sociability is a basic instinct and each person impulsively searches for companionship with others like himself/herself. As explained by Gelabert (2007) a person who is completely isolated cannot find complete self- fulfillment. For the university students, living together in a group is the basis of all learning. This is because they assimilate their culture from the environment around them. This culture includes language, reading, writing, daily behaviours and traditions. The students may also tend to associate together in order to determine their relative value. It is through comparison with others that the students can develop their various competencies. In their interaction with individuals in the society, students require to be guided in social behaviour and relationships. Due to the heterogeneous background of students in the educational institutions, social counselling is vital to provide adequate direction for their proper social adjustment (Mohanty, 2003). Biswalo (1996) states that all students would need social counselling to enable them gain understanding of the root causes of their problems and to make rational decisions on how to solve or cope with the problems. Therefore, students may be guided in social behaviour and relationships since they come from heterogeneous backgrounds and because majority of them are at adolescent stage of life may require adequate direction for their proper social adjustment. The students may be encouraged to practice various social skills such as patience, love or kindness, friendliness, sensitivity, respect for other people's property, communication skills respect for others, forgiveness, humility, honesty, tolerance and obedience. These social skills help promote good interpersonal relationships within the institutions. It is necessary that the counsellors view students' issues in light of developmental needs because during their university years, students continue to develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. As they develop their academic, social and personal competencies, the students are also absorbed in developing and maintaining close relationships.

Personal competency means that the students have suitable knowledge on how to deal with personality maladjustments such as unhappiness, annoyance and anger, inability to meet needs and get aspirations into fruition. Gelabert (2007), points out some factors that may hinder personal growth such as stress and anxiety, excessive frustration, lack of knowledge and partial or total failure. Students have problems related to themselves, their parents and family, loneliness, failure, feelings of inadequacy and sometimes inferiority. Moreover as noted by Jarvis and Chandler (2002) low self –esteem is associated with loneliness. These sometimes create serious emotional conflicts in the students. Students need effective personal counselling to help them go through various psychological problems. As highlighted Mohanty (2003), students also acquire information on sex

and family life education so that they are able to deal with related social relationships. Personal counselling is vital for students in providing understanding of the internal issues and problems and thus trying to help them with genuine sympathy. This will include providing inspiration and encouragement to overcome the difficulties and pursue activities according to personal interests.

Hypothesis

HO₁: There is no statistically significant difference in the efficacy of guidance and counselling services between public and private universities on development of the students’ social competence.

HO₂: There is no statistically significant difference in the efficacy of guidance and counselling services between public and private universities on development of the students’ personal competence.

Conceptual Framework

The model (Figure 1) shows how the study variables were conceptualized. The independent variable determines the dependent variables while the intervening variables have great influence on both independent and dependent variables.

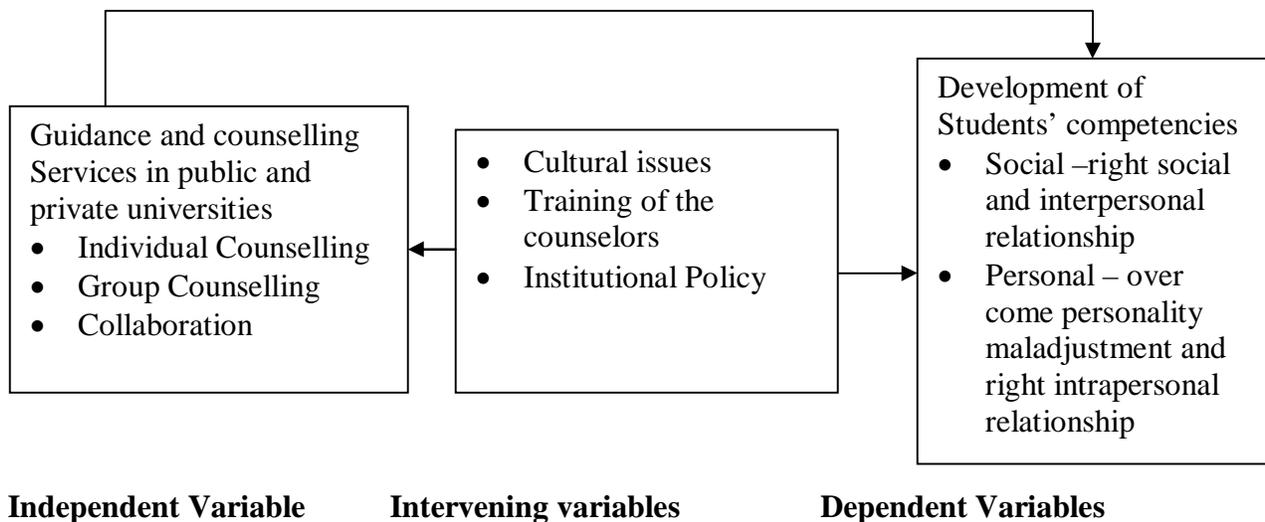


Figure 1: Conceptual framework: A model showing the relationship of the study variables that determine efficacy of guidance and counselling services on students’ development of social and personal competencies in public and private universities in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The following techniques were used for the study

Research Design

The study applied *ex post facto* casual-comparative design. As explained by Gall (1996), in this design, the researcher does not manipulate the variables and it enabled the researcher to make comparisons between the public and private universities in the efficacy of guidance and counselling services based on student development social and personal competencies.

Population

The target population of the study was the undergraduate students in both public and private universities in Kenya. The accessible population was 19,161 third and fourth year students in purposively selected six universities.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of 369 students were randomly sampled. The other respondents in the study included ten university student counsellors in public and private universities who were purposefully sampled. In addition, thirty six peer counsellors also participated in the study. Thus, the total sample was four hundred and fifteen.

Instruments for Data collection

Three data collection tools were used. These included the students' questionnaire, Peer counsellors focus group discussion and the student counsellors' interview schedule. The instruments contained items which sought responses on efficacy of guidance and counselling services on students' development of social and personal competencies in public and private universities. Both qualitative and quantitative data on was collected.

Reliability

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the items and a reliability coefficient for social and personal competences was 0.96 and 0.91 respectively. Thus the items were considered reliable.

Data analysis

T- test was used to analyse the data at a significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Comparisons of efficacy of Guidance and Counselling Services on University Students Development of Social Competence in Public and Private Universities

Table 1. Independent Samples t-test for Equality of Means on Development of Students' Social Competence between Public and Private Universities

	Type of University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Social competencies	public	282	30.8121	9.96632	-3.301	363	.001
	private	83	35.0120	10.91485			

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the computed p- value (0.001) was lower than the set alpha value (0.05). Therefore, it was concluded that there is a significant difference in development of students' social competence between the public and private universities. The null hypothesis was rejected. The mean score for private universities (35.012) is higher than the mean score for the public universities (30.812). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that guidance and counselling services in private universities have been able to assist the students develop their social

competence to a better level compared to public universities. This may have raised good social relations in the private universities hence promoting a conducive learning environment. This implication may explain the few incidences of students disturbances witnessed in private universities as compared to the persistent ones in public universities. For instance, the public university students' unrests as noted by Otieno (2010). This finding may therefore lead to the support of what is noted in GOK (2006) that if universities provide proper training programmes and experiences, students develop social competence, independence, integrity and a high degree of accountability.

Through effective social guidance and counselling services, the students acquire information about various social issues which influence every individual every now and then. The students therefore develop right ideas and conduct for living in a socially useful manner. The student also acquires opportunities for training and education for work hence living joyfully. It was apparent from the study that guidance and counselling services provided in public and private universities assist greatly the students in development of their social and personal competencies. This concurs with the argument of Biswalo (1996) that guidance and counselling services are crucial in higher learning institutions and because of the growing complexity in educational, vocational and social structures, they should be provided in the best way possible. Moreover (GOK, 2006) indicates that public universities need to provide, social and spiritual mentorship programmes for their students. In addition, these institutions need to provide education and preventive measures of substance abuse including declaring public areas such as lecture rooms, laboratories, offices as non smoking and drug free zones.

Comparisons of Efficacy of Guidance and Counselling Services on University Students Development of Personal Competence between Public and Private Universities

Table 2. Independent Samples t-test for Equality of Means on Development of Students' Personal Competence between Public and Private Universities.

	Type of University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Personal competencies	public	282	28.5461	10.36383	-3.060	363	.002
	private	83	32.6386	11.81213			

The results in Table 2 reveal that the mean scores in personal competence for students in private universities was 32.639 and for those in public universities was 28.546. It is clear that the mean difference was high in private universities. The t-test results revealed that there are significant differences in development of students' personal competence between the public and private universities. The computed p-value (0.002) was smaller than the set alpha value (0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that guidance and counselling services in private universities have significantly assisted the students to develop their personal competence than in public universities.

The efficacy of guidance and counselling services in private universities could have been possible with the observation of availability of the appropriate counselling structures in these settings. For

instance adequate physical and human resources may attract clients for counselling services. According to McLeod (2000) the availability of suitable, private and convenient rooms for conducting counselling is of prime importance to allow confidentiality. Wango and Mungai (2007) explain that a conducive counselling room contributes to the overall efficacy of the counseling process.

Other counsellors especially in the public universities explained that they were involved in administration duties as Deans of students or dealing with students' disciplinary issues. The counsellors argued that their services were meant to assist students deal with psychological disturbances. This concurs with what Egan (2002) indicates that the goal of counselling is to reduce psychological disturbances of the clients. The researcher also realized the issue of stigmatization on those willing to attend counselling services.

Mohanty (2003) explains that effective personal guidance and counselling provides the students inspiration and encouragement with genuine empathy and in time to overcome their personal problems. Personal guidance and counselling involves understanding the internal issues and problems of the students taking them into confidence and trying to help them. Mcquiness (1998) emphasizes that personal counselling is a helping process that helps individuals to get access to a greater part of their personal resources as a means of responding to the challenges of their lives. Counselling therefore uses specific skills and techniques in the relationship to help people become more competent and realist in dealing with their own challenges. This could be the reason for significant growth in students' personal competence in private universities. When the personal counselling services are effective, it means that the counsellor is able to identify students' personal problems and provide proper direction in time. Thus the internal issues and problems of students are taken into confidence and the counsellor tries to help with genuine empathy. The students are inspired and encouraged to overcome their difficulties and become competent in pursuing activities according to their personal interests.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, significant differences were reported on development of the students' social and personal competencies between public and private universities. The students in private universities seemed to have higher positive growth of their competencies through assistance of guidance and counselling services compared to those enrolled in public universities. It can, therefore, be concluded that the difference in student behaviour witnessed in the two types of universities was due to the state of students' development of their social and personal competencies.

People enter the field of counselling from a variety of backgrounds with general objective of helping people live more effectively with themselves and others. In both public and private universities counsellors work in areas ranging from problem prevention to remediation and treatment. From their service provision, effective counsellors can be distinguished from ineffective counsellors by the nature and quality of relationship skills used. Clients of ineffective counsellors become worse, whereas clients of effective ones improve. Competence in the execution of attending, responding and initiating skills determines a counsellors' efficacy. There is also a relationship between personality characteristics and efficacy in counselling (Nisenhoiz & Peterson, 1995). The quality of the therapeutic bond is determined by the counsellors' personal characteristics such as the ability to communicate empathy and concern to the clients and

willingness to be vulnerable and open. The effective interpersonal skills include communicating empathy, respect, concreteness, confrontation, and self-disclosure.

Thus Biswalo (1996) points out that universities need effective students guidance and counselling services that can assist the students with the knowledge about the world of work, choice of courses, social habits and besides because most campuses are mercilessly assailed by drug and alcohol abuse, unplanned pregnancies, depression and other numerous social and personal problems. For effective counselling services the counsellors need to be guided by a counselling policy, supervision activities, teamwork, knowledge of collaboration, code of conduct and proper budgeting systems. This will put university counselling services in the right track in catering for the psychological needs of the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the findings that effective guidance and counselling services in the universities assist students to develop social and personal competences. It was found that significant differences existed in efficacy of guidance and counselling in the development of student social and personal competencies between public and private universities. The students in private universities showed high levels of development in social and personal competencies compared to those in public universities. Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that managers in public universities investigate critically. There should be a clear policy on provision of guidance and counselling services in the universities. The rules and activities of the counselling service providers should be clearly known in order to enhance the psychological services expected of counsellors. There is need to allocate guidance and counselling departments a budget to cater for the counselling facilities.

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