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GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A REALITY OR A CASE OF POLITICAL SYMBOLISM? A FOCUS ON SCHOOLS IN CHEGUTU DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE.

Dr. Wellington Samkange

Senior Lecturer: Zimbabwe Open University:
Faculty of Arts and Education;
Department of Educational Studies;
Harare/Chitungwiza Regional Campus Box 8306
Harare,
ZIMBABWE

Tazivei Dondofema

Lecturer: Zimbabwe Open University:
Faculty of Arts and Education;
Department of Teacher Development;
Harare/Chitungwiza Regional Campus Box 8306
Harare,
ZIMBABWE

ABSTRACT

There are a variety of challenges that confront students in educational institutions. These problems are wide and varied. These include behaviour modification challenges, adjustment to new demands in the school set-up, managing their social and physical conditions, pressure exerted on them by different experiences and other conditions related to their health, and family health. Such challenges have led to institutions and Departments of Education establishing counselling units within their organisations. Within the same context, institutions have adopted different approaches to counselling. These approaches include the psychodynamic approach to counselling, the humanistic approach to counselling, the behavioural approach to counselling and the systems approach to counselling. The purpose of the study was to assess the extent to which the Guidance and Counselling programme has been implemented in the selected schools. It aims at establishing the nature of counselling in primary schools. The study used the mixed methodology and the case study design. The sample was conveniently selected. It comprised ten primary schools in Chegutu District of Zimbabwe. The respondents comprised ten school heads, ten teachers and ten teachers in charge of the infant department. Data on how they counselled teachers and pupils was collected to establish the extent to which counselling in the schools would be described as relevant and functional. Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires, structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The study concluded that there were no clearly defined counselling structures in the selected schools. Even those that provided counselling to teachers and pupils, they did not have any training in counselling. There was a tendency to rely on the Schools Psychological Services which were found at district offices. It was noted that these were mostly visible when there were cases of abuse in schools. The study concluded that guidance and counselling in the selected primary schools was more of political symbolism than reality. The study recommends that



counselling be taken seriously. There should be a trained counsellor at every school, who apart from teaching guidance and counselling as a subject should provide counselling services to both pupils and teachers.

Key words: Guidance and Counselling; Counsellor; Programme; Social Systems Approach; Political Symbolism; Primary School.

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There are a number of cases that have been reported in the press on issues of abuse and indiscipline among pupils. Some of the problems have led to pupils being expelled or transferred to other schools. While most of the reports have tended to focus on secondary schools, issues that require guidance and counselling affect both adults and children. The common problems relate to teenage pregnancies, abuse of children and social conditions at home. At times pupils become victims of abuse by adults. These adults include parents, guardians, relatives and in some instances teachers. Society has a role to provide guidance so that some of the problems are avoided or at least minimised. Guidance plays a very important role in decisions that we make in everyday life. However, there are also problems that befall us as human species which are beyond our control. In both cases counselling remains essential. There are a number of identifiable cases of child abuse and these have triggered the researchers' interest in the area of guidance and counselling in schools. Cases of child abuse appear to be on the increase in Zimbabwe. The Herald 19 March 2016 noted that child abuse cases were on the rise in Zimbabwe and states that there were more than 12 000 cases of child abuse in 2015. The cases of child abuse are much more than the numbers stated as many cases go unnoticed and unreported. The school in this regard has a multi-faced role. First, the school have a role to play in preventing child abuse. Secondly, the school becomes an agent through which children are educated and informed of their rights. Thirdly, the school should be able to deal with victims of abuse and other social ills by providing the necessary counselling.

Cases of abuse have to be well handled by qualified personnel. If they are haphazardly dealt with, the victims become locked up in a psychological prison as they are at times traumatised for life. Dealing with children who are traumatised has a ripple effect on the development of society as a whole. They will grow into adult life with the trauma which will affect their view of life and society and it then becomes a vicious cycle that can affect generations if not well managed. Interventions by the Ministry of Education have included the establishment of the Department of the School Psychological Services. Personnel of the Department are stationed at the Education District Offices.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Children are now faced with many challenges in their lives. Some of the challenges include assuming the roles of heading families before they become adults, caring for ill parents and relatives, abuses by adults, and challenges related to their school work. The school has to play a critical role in providing guidance and counselling to affected children. The statement of the problem is therefore expressed in question form: How have schools implemented the guidance and counselling programme?

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to assess the implementation of the guidance and counselling programme in the selected schools.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following four objectives:

- To establish how counsellors are playing their roles in schools.
- To identify common problems that require counselling in schools.
- To describe how schools have implemented the guidance and counselling programme.
- To identify challenges schools have encountered in the implementation of the guidance and counselling programme.



1.4 Research questions

In order to find answers to the research problem the study came up with the following research questions:

- How have counsellors played their roles in schools?
- What are the main problems that require guidance and counselling in schools?
- How has the guidance and counselling programme been implemented in schools?
- What are the challenges that have been encountered in the implementation of the guidance and counselling programme?

1.5 Significance of the study

Children need proper guidance and counselling in order for them to make informed decisions as they grow into adult life. With proper guidance and counselling children become well informed about themselves and the environment. The study is important to teachers, school heads and parents as it reminds them of the roles they have to play in the development of children. The study also informs policy makers and policy implementers on the need to be rigorous in implementing the guidance and counselling programme in schools.

1.6 Assumptions

The study is based on the following assumptions:

- The selected schools are implementing the guidance and counselling programme.
- There are challenges that have hindered the smooth implementation of the guidance and counselling programme in schools.

1.7 Delimitations

The study focused on ten primary schools in Chegutu District of Zimbabwe. These were conveniently selected. All the schools are in the town of Chegutu and included government schools, church-related schools and council schools. The study focused on the organisation, and structure of the guidance and counselling programme in schools.

1.8 Limitations

Guidance and counselling is a very important area in the education of children. In view of this, a study that covers a wider area derived from a representative sample could have helped the researchers to come up with a sample whose findings could have been generalised to the wider population. Limited resources and time forced the researchers to focus on the schools that were easily accessible to them. The case study design was employed and as such the results may be affected by the general limitations of the case study as a research design.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Framework: Guidance and Counselling

The terms guidance and counselling have been at times used synonymously and yet they do not mean the same thing. They may have the same intentions but do not necessarily mean the same thing. Effective guidance helps in preventing the problem rather than being reactive to a problem. It aims at developing different skills within a child in order for the child to be able to gain knowledge and understanding of herself/himself and others. Mapfumo (2001) demonstrates the distinction between the two concepts by noting that guidance is much broader than counselling as it focuses on providing people with information that contributes to them making



informed decisions. Within this context Mapfumo (2001) views counselling as one of the activities involved in the guidance process. While guidance is very much related to some of the methods we use in teaching, counselling involves information provision, establishing rapport, consultation, measurement of frequency, appraisal among other activities.

Corey (1991) on the other hand defines counselling as the assistance which comes to a child through either face-to-face or group contact with a professionally trained person in a psychological relationship using either, talk, play or storytelling. Fredericks (2002) refers to counselling as a helping interview which will provide the interviewee a meaningful experience. That experience has to contribute to a change in ideas, a change in feelings about oneself and others and a change in view. It has to contribute to new perceptions in terms of how an individual looks at an existing problem. Counselling therefore helps the individual to adjust and adapt to the demands of the new situation. The two definitions highlight key elements about the concept counselling. These are that counselling is a form of assistance that it follows specific techniques and for it to be effective it has to contribute to behaviour change. It is also important to note that Corey (1991) makes reference to the use of a professionally trained person. A counsellor has to be professionally trained if the face-to-face contact is to help the individual manage the change.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

There are many theories and approaches that have been used in counselling. These include the psychodynamic approach to counselling, the humanistic approach to counselling, the behavioural approach to counselling and the systems approach to counselling. These approaches employ different counselling methods which include listening, empathy, questioning, scaling and clarifying among other techniques. The study will not go into details about each of the identified perspective, but refer to them briefly in passing. The main focus is on the social systems theory in counselling. It was found relevant in the study because of its focus on the individual and the environment. The environment can either be the social environment or the physical environment. The school is part of the child's social environment and physical environment.

In view of the other theories in counselling noted above, Shea and Bauer (1994) identify three other perspectives in counselling. These are the behavioural perspective, the psycho-educational perspective, and the biophysical perspective. According to Shea and Bauer (1994) within the context of the behavioural perspective, an individual's behaviour is viewed as being maintained by the stimuli in the immediate environment in which the individual is functioning and as such any help provided has to involve manipulating those stimuli and managing the immediate environment to facilitate change in the individual's behaviour. As noted by different behaviour theorists such as Pavlov, Watson, Skinner, Wolpe among others, conditions such as classical conditioning, stimulus-response associations and operant conditioning which guide learning can be used in guidance to change and influence behaviour in people. Within the context of the behaviour perspective, there is the social cognitive theory as postulated by Bandura and Beck's cognitive approach (Nelson-Jones, 1997). What stands out within the context of this perspective is its focus on the stimuli not the factors within the individual or the individual's extended environment. In that regard its area of focus on the stimulus at the expense of the factors within the individual becomes a source of its weaknesses in guidance and counselling. If we were to be guided by Bandura's social cognitive theory, counselling should have a holistic approach to behaviour change. Counselling would require that the counsellor focuses on the different aspects as they interact. The aspects to be examined within this context include the behavioural, physical, cognitive and emotional factors within the affected individual. On the other the focus of Beck's approach within the behavioural perspective reminds us of the importance of information and how we process it. It is underpinned by the assumption that our experiences play an integral part in the manner we act and react to situations. The approach reminds us of the importance of treating as individuals who have are guided by different belief systems.

Another perspective is the psycho-educational perspective. Within this perspective are the psychodynamic counselling and psychoanalysis approach as postulated by Freud. The psycho-educational perspective places emphasis on "the dynamic equilibrium of intra-psychoic phenomena such as the id (basic instinct), ego (manager), and the superego" (Shea and Bauer, 1994:7). Apart from the emphasis on the above aspects the counsellor has to also focus on both the immediate and extended environments in order to assist the affected individual. The counselling process has to provide for free association which allows the individual to open up and transference in order to reduce resistance.

The biophysical perspective incorporates the view that the behaviour problem might require medical intervention. As noted by Shea and Bauer (1994) the perspective places emphasis on neurological and other organic factors as the cause of behaviour and as such in order to address the behaviour problem the individual has to be assisted to manage stimuli. Such assistance may include providing for needs such as love, safety, nutrition, medication and other supporting needs.



2.3 The Social Systems Perspective

While the relevance of the above perspectives cannot be overlooked in counselling, the influence of the systems approach acknowledges that every subsystem has a role to play in the development of the child. They remain relevant as there is always the need to focus on the individual if counselling is to achieve its intended goals. The school is one of these subsystems. It is therefore necessary to interrogate how it plays its major roles, thus proving guidance and counselling to learners and teachers. To understand the system theory it may be necessary to look at the term system. Guttman (1991) defines a system as a unified whole with interrelated parts such that the whole can be identified as being different from the sum of its parts and any change in one part affects the rest of the system. Hough (2012) refers to systemic theory as ideas of counselling based on a specialised branch of psychotherapy that considers interpersonal relationships and the systemic interrelationships within a group in the diagnosis and therapy of psychological problems and interpersonal conflicts. In other words, if counselling is to be effective, the theory recognises that all the elements that make up the subsystem must be recognised and change within the individual has to be within a social context.

According to Kottler (2004) the systemic approach to counselling goes through stages. These are the first contact stage, joining the family stage, assessment stage, reorientation stage, structural realignments and intervention stage. In the first contact stage it is important that the counsellor is accessible so as to be able to interact with all family members. In the second stage it is important that one builds a connection with the family members. In the assessment stage there is need to check the power hierarchies within the family, at the same time establishing channels of communication. There is also need to establish the developments within the family, before taking action. What therefore stands out in this approach is the involvement of other subsystems like the family in counselling. The theory explores behaviour patterns by focusing on group behavioural patterns. The other aspect of the systemic approach is how the different subsystems such as the school and the home have to play their roles in the counselling process. In order for the subsystems to function effectively and efficiently the expectation, needs, desires, and characters of all involved in the counselling process have to be examined and considered. The systems theory recognises that every member is connected to each other through a system of overlapping and intertwining relationships that can only be deciphered when all members work as one.

There are a number of assumptions on which the systems theory of counselling is based. Legg and Scher (1996) identified six basic assumptions on systems approach. These are that psychological problems have to be understood within a social and political; that interaction is central to psychological inquiry; beliefs and behaviours control relationships within families and people; problems may occur at particular developmental stages of individuals, families and societies; that language is the medium of expressing the problems that people present; and that the systemic counsellor strives to be empathic.

The two common models of the systems theory are the Minnuchin's model and Milan's approach of systems approach. According to Minnuchin as cited by Rukuni (2004) Minnuchin's model focuses on the structure and organisation of the system and patterns of interactions within the family and that there are rules and patterns and that families are hierarchical. Minnuchin argues that there are three subsystems that are important in the systems approach. These are the spouse, the parent and sibling subsystem. As noted by Rukuni (2004) Milan's model of systems theory shares similarities with that of Minnuchin, but emphasizes the link between people's beliefs and behaviours and that an observer is part of the system. The model also focuses on feedback from interaction of members, individuals and beliefs and the context that is found within the family environment.

The school by its nature is a system. As a system it is made up of subsystems such as parents, pupils, teachers, and other stakeholders. The teacher has to apply systemic counselling in the classroom situation. When dealing with children a teacher has to come up with appropriate strategies for counselling. The teacher can employ group counselling and individual counselling. In the case of group counselling the group size is very important. The teacher has to come up with counselling groups guided by the developmental level of the children. These groups are also influenced by age, and the nature of disturbances. According to Rosenthal (2005) children's group counselling practice recommends an optimal size of five to seven children. A teacher has to observe that children exhibit different therapeutic needs that are different from those of adults. In grouping the children, the teacher has to group them in such a way that they exert a corrective influence upon each other and it may be necessary that the group is comprised of a heterogeneous group. Van Velsor (2004) contends that children with dissimilar syndromes should be placed together, so that each child may have the opportunity to associate with personalities different from his or her own.

The use of group counselling by the teacher has a number of advantages especially to children. Van Velsor (2004) notes that group counselling helps children in many different ways. Van Velsor (2004) argues that group counselling helps children recognise that other



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children have concerns that are similar to theirs; they also learn and improve social skills through modelling and experimentation; children experience vicarious learning; invest self in others; explore ideas with others; and encourage and reward team spirit.

However, the teacher has to limit the negative impacts of such an approach. The teacher has to guide against some children monopolising the whole group. There is therefore need to share time equitably. Group counselling can override the need for individualised counselling.

The systems approach requires that the teacher involves the families in counselling children. Such counselling goes through stages that help the teacher understand the problem. These stages include interacting with family members, establishing the hierarchy in the family, establishing communication channels, establishing family culture and then taking action. Understanding the different relations on the part of the teacher helps in appreciating the human systems, structures, and boundaries. These structures and boundaries help the teacher examine various systems within or around the child. Dealing with the family will help in the interpretation of the child's behaviour. The systems approach enables the teacher to have a holistic approach to the problems of a child. This is important in that values and beliefs influence children's behaviour. This approach recognises that a problem is only part of a whole and as such, a problem is not a problem on itself, but it is part of a larger process involving other people and family members. The approach also recognises that the problems that children show at school may be as a result of problems related to relationships and interaction within the home and community. The role of the teacher is to explore, through the systems approach, how the different subsystems may be contributing to the child's problem.

The teacher has to understand the unique arrangements within families. These differences come about as a result of differences in norms and families among families. If the teacher adopts a holistic approach to counselling as advocated by the systems approach, the teacher can extend the help to family members. While it is important to consider the whole, the teacher does not have to lose focus of the individual child who needs therapy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed methodology. This was found necessary as the researchers found that there were some research questions that required both qualitative and quantitative responses. Data was collected through the use of structured questionnaires, open-ended questionnaires, document analysis and face-to-face interviews. The document analysed was the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Draft Teachers' Manual (Guidance and Counselling Programme). The researchers visited the respondents in their schools and distributed questionnaires and set interview date with them. There was a 100 % response rate to the questionnaires and interviews.

3.1 Research Design

The study used the case study design.

3.2 Sample and sampling procedure

The schools were purposively selected. The school heads and teachers-in-charge of the infant departments automatically became participants in the study. As for teachers the study focused on those that handled counselling issues in their respective schools. The researchers were referred to these by the school heads.

3.3 Data collection methods

The study used both qualitative methods and quantitative methods of data collection. These included open-ended questionnaires, structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews.

3.4 Findings

The findings are presented based on the themes that emerged from the responses from the school heads, teachers-in-charge and teachers.



4. ROLES PLAYED BY THE TEACHER AS A COUNSELLOR IN SCHOOLS

In all the ten primary schools all the respondents indicated that they did not have full time or part-time counsellors at their schools. However school heads indicated that since every teacher was expected to teach Guidance and Counselling as a subject, teachers were expected to provide counselling services. Some school heads noted that they at times appointed senior teachers to head counselling committees in their schools. In other cases teachers volunteered to provide counselling to pupils and teachers. When the school heads were asked to explain the criterion they used to appoint counsellors experience in the teaching service appeared to be the main factor they considered, followed by the personality of the teacher and the teacher's qualifications were among the least considered factors. In all cases there were no trained counsellors. It was observed that in all the schools the position of a counsellor was considered to be an extra responsibility that fell outside the schools' working hours.

The teachers in the sample were asked to indicate three of the major roles they played as counsellors in the schools. They were asked to select from the following roles: counselling; consultation; career information service; appraising; co-ordinating; referring children to specialists; needs assessment; educational guidance; and communication. The three major roles that the teachers played as counsellors were referring cases to the school head and specialists; needs assessment and educational guidance. The teachers did not refer to the other roles as they noted that there was little counselling in their schools. Some noted that they were only involved when there had been specific cases of abuse in the school.

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they had schemed and planned Guidance and Counselling as a subject. All the teachers indicated that they had schemed and planned it just like all other subjects. When asked to indicate how often they had taught it per week, 90% of the teachers said that they rarely taught the subject and only 10% noted that they taught the subject once per week. The major challenge was that the subject was not replacing any subject in terms of time allocation; as such it had to be provided for outside the already congested time-table.

What also emerged from the responses of the school heads, teachers-in-charge was that guidance and counselling was now a subject that had to be taught in both the infant department and the junior department at primary school. To this effect there was a draft of the teachers' manual that was supposed to be used as a syllabus for the implementation of the guidance and counselling programme in schools. This manual is from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The manual identifies the content that has to be covered at both infant level and junior level at primary school. At the infant level the topics to be covered include the following: Identity; Rights and Responsibilities; Unhu/Ubuntu; Relationships; Family Life Education; and Healthy Living. The junior level focuses on the following topics: Relationships; Human Growth and Development; Health; Values, Beliefs and Citizenship, Care, Management, Mitigation; and Child Protection. An analysis of the manual shows the importance of the areas focus to the development of the child. However, the major focus of the manual appears to be on child guidance at the expense of child counselling. For child counselling to occur there has to be provision for face-to-face contact with the child. Such contact to occur there is need for a professionally qualified counsellor. In that regard the guidance and counselling programme should go beyond a school subject, but a lived experience that incorporates the school and the home. Counselling by its nature has to assist the child in at least two ways, first to prevent a problem and secondly to solve an existing problem.

5. PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS

The major problems prevalent in the schools as noted by the school heads, teachers-in-charge include children with disabilities, children with special needs, behaviour problems, dealing with bereavement and illness in the family, orphaned children, and different forms of abuses. Some of the abuses involved sexual abuses. One school head noted that he had experienced a case of sexual abuse. He noted that when such cases arose their role as a school involved informing the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education district offices and the police. He noted that such cases were usually handled by the Schools Psychological Services at the District offices and Provincial offices of education. The school head noted that the school did not play much of a role when it came to counselling as they did not have a trained counsellor. As such they did not know what to say and what not to say. He further noted that in cases where attempts were made to provide counselling, the school tended to focus on the victim of the abuse and completely ignored the abuser.



6. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMME

There are a number of challenges that were identified in the implementation of the guidance and counselling programme in schools. One of the major challenges is based on the assumption that any teacher can be a counsellor. While it is a welcome development in schools to have Guidance and Counselling as a subject, this is not the same as providing guidance and counselling services at the schools. The addition of Guidance and Counselling as a subject came as a burden to teachers as it was not accompanied by a clear policy on time allocation. It might have been necessary to reduce the time allocated to the time allocated to other subject per week in order to fit in the new subject. There is work overload on the part of teachers who have many subjects to teach and large classes to manage.

Another challenge noted was that Guidance and Counselling as a subject was not being examined at Grade seven level. It therefore suffers the same fate as other subjects that are not examined as observed by Samkange and Chimbadzwa (2016) in their study of factors affecting the teaching and learning of Music in rural secondary schools. They noted that Music as a subject was not getting the attention it deserves because most secondary schools were not examining it at O'level.

Respondents noted that counselling demanded privacy and as such all the schools did not have such facilities. Another challenge noted was related to lack of involvement of parents in guidance and counselling matters. Both teachers and parents have to be involved in guidance and counselling. Another challenge noted was lack of training in guidance and counselling. One teacher noted that she had attended a guidance and counselling workshop more than two years ago.

Other challenges related to the nature of abuses that occur in schools. School heads had challenges with handling cases of sexual abuse. As noted by some of the school heads, even if they wanted to provide counselling, they did not know what to say and what not to say.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The study came up with the following conclusions:

- There is no formal guidance and counselling provided to children in the selected primary schools. There is a misconception that all teachers can provide guidance and counselling.
- Guidance and Counselling as a subject was not being taught as expected due to time constraints on the part of the teachers.
- All the schools did not have trained full time or part-time counsellors. The assumption was that teachers can effectively play the roles of a counsellor.
- Guidance and Counselling is being treated as one of the subjects at primary school but not all teachers are teaching it because of a variety of reasons which include work overload on the part of the teacher.
- The problems that require counselling are wide and varied and trained personnel to handle some of the cases are not found within schools.
- The Department of Schools Psychological Services tended to be reactive rather than proactive to problems as they do not have personnel in schools.
- Most of the challenges related to guidance and counselling relate to the misconception that teaching guidance and counselling is the same as providing counselling services, lack of training on the part of teachers and lack of a collaborative approach between schools and the community on the issue of guidance and counselling.
- In cases where schools tried to provide counselling, such counselling tended to leave out the abuser and focused on the victim and yet both require counselling.



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- It can be generally concluded that there were no formal guidance and counselling services in all the ten schools and as such guidance and counselling at primary school appears to be more of another case of political symbolism than reality.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study came up with the following recommendations:

- There is need to separate the teaching of Guidance and Counselling as a subject from the provision of Guidance and Counselling services schools should provide.
- Teachers should be trained in Guidance and Counselling.
- There is need for trained counsellors in schools. Such counsellors can be engaged on either part-time or full time basis.
- The Department of Schools Psychological Services should have personnel in schools, alternatively based in district offices but providing services to schools.

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