

Assessment of Counselling Needs among Students in Kenyan Universities

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this paper was to investigate the counselling needs of students in Kenyan universities. The counselling needs investigated were categorised into career/educational needs, personal needs, and life skills needs. The study employed descriptive survey research design. A sample of 487 respondents who comprised students, student counsellors and peer counsellors from six randomly selected universities of Kenya were used. Stratified, Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires for the students and the peer counsellors and an interview schedule for the student counsellors. Descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that students in Kenyan universities experienced the three categories of needs. The results in weights and averages were: Career/Educational needs (WA=2.66), personal needs (WA=3.01) and life skills needs (WA=2.66). It was recommended that the universities carry out needs assessment on a continuous basis in order to develop or modify counselling programmes that are in line with the ever changing student needs. The findings of this study may help the policy makers, university administrators and student counsellors to realise that students' needs are ever changing and thus a continuous needs assessment is essential in order to offer guidance and counselling services that are congruent to the needs of the student in the Kenyan universities.

Key words: Counselling Needs, Kenyan universities, students

1.0 Introduction

As humans interact with the physical, social, cultural and economic environment, they are faced with a variety of challenges. These challenges vary from one individual to the other as influenced by such factors as age, gender, interests, social economic status, culture and educational level (Aluende, McEachern & Kenny, 2005). For instance, students joining universities for the first time will experience adjustment difficulties, fears and anxieties, career and academic issues (Wangeri, Kimani & Mutweleli, 2012). The adolescents will experience problems with deciding who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life as they confront many roles from vocational to romantic in trying to get their real selves (Santrock, 2005). Santrock (2005) adds that the young adults will struggle with issues of intimacy and choosing life partners while those at middle life will have midlife crises. In order to help people meet their counselling needs at various stages of life, a continuous needs assessment is important so that guidance and counselling programmes that are congruent to their needs can be developed.

Education has brought about new needs such as career choices, transitions from one academic level to another, job placements, economic hardships, technological issues mental health issues, and social and personal developmental issues (Nayak, 2007). When students join universities and colleges for the first time, they are exposed to problems related to transition, orientation, career choice, adjustment and disciplinary restrictions (Muola & Migosi, 2012). Rapid change in work world and labour force, violence in the homes, schools and community, divorce, teenage suicide, sexual experimentation are all challenges that have great negative effects on the personal, social, career and academic development of all learners (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). In agreement with this is Okumu (n.d) who says that the changes are leaving the young people in a state of confusion, uncertain of what to do and alienated. Student needs assessment may help the university administrators to know the student needs and thus develop strategies to address them.

Assessment of students' counselling needs has multiple benefits. These benefits include their usefulness in developing large and small group programs focused on the expressed student needs especially for students who are reluctant to seek individual counselling, training of students' counsellors could be by local research on counselling needs and it's an efficient method of identifying students concerns (Aluende, 2001; Nicholas, 1995).

Agatha (2006) adds that the surveys can be used in decision making and in improving or modifying of the programs. Astromovich (2011) argue that the information gathered through needs assessment may help professional counsellors in various specialities to identify critical needs of the population to whom they serve. Counselling needs assessment should help counsellors to refine the existing programmes or create new services that will meet the specific needs of the student population (Astromovich, 2011). American School Counselling Association (1997) argues that the goal of comprehensive guidance and counselling program is to provide all students with life success skills. These programs are developmental in nature and they should assist students to acquire and use lifelong skills through the development of academic, career, self-awareness and interpersonal communication skills (Nyutu, 2007). Despite the existence of counselling services in the Kenyan universities, students continue to engage in maladaptive behaviours such as strikes, drug and substance abuse, boycotts, criminal activities like kidnappings, stealing, murder and prostitution. The question here is, why the maladaptive behaviours? Could the students be having unmet counselling needs leading to the maladaptive behaviours? It is against this background that the researchers aimed at assessing the counselling needs of the students in Kenyan universities.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of guidance and counselling services in Kenyan universities, numerous problems and needs continue to be reported among the students; relationship needs, poor academic performance, drug and substance abuse, financial difficulties, prostitution, murder, kidnappings, theft, career issues, adjustment problems, psychological and behavioural difficulties. It is against this background that the researchers sought to assess the counselling needs of the students in Kenyan universities.

1.2 Research Question

The study sought to answer the following research question

What are the counselling needs of students in the Kenyan Universities?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study aimed at assessing the counselling needs of students in Kenyan universities.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be of importance to the policy makers, university administrators, student counsellors, parents and students in the universities. The findings may assist educational policy makers, university administrators and student counsellors to know the counselling needs that face their students and thus modify or implement new counselling programmes that can meet the needs. The parents through the findings of this study may get insight as they advice their children on various issues and challenges of life in the universities. The findings may help the students to know various needs that exist amongst themselves and this may encourage some of them to offer help as peer counsellors in the universities.

2. Literature Review

In the process of growth and development, human beings experience many needs that need to be met in order to have optimal growth and development (Berk, 2005). Mutie and Ndambuki (2004) add that in the process of growing up many young people globally are faced with numerous personal problems. Thus, the need to explore and understand oneself increases during adolescence and early adulthood. Theorists who have contributed ideas on human growth and development such as Erickson, Piaget and Freud have viewed human life span to occur in stages and thus the needs that face a growing person changes from one stage to another. For instance, in Psychosexual theory, Freud's second stage of development is Anal stage (1-3yrs), and the major need is toilet training, the care giver has the responsibility of training the child at the most appropriate time and manner to avoid fixation which results to a very messy and disorderly person (Berk, 2005, Santrock, 2005). In Ericson's psychosocial theory, each developmental stage has its own developmental task, for instance, at adolescent stage the developmental task is identity versus role confusion (Berk, 2005; Santrock, 2005). The adolescents are faced with deciding who they are, what they are all about and where they are going in life, they confront many new roles from vocational to romantic, as they try to get their real selves (Berk, 2005). The adolescents who successfully cope with these conflicting roles and identities emerge with a new sense of self, both refreshing and acceptable (Berk, 2005). Those adolescents who do not successfully resolve the identity crises suffer role confusion (Berk, 2005; Santrock, 2005). Schooling and education similarly occur in stages. Each level of education presents itself with challenges, some of the university students are adolescents; they are trying to understand who they are, what their duty in the university is all about, and where they are going. As they adapt

to the university life, they may face various challenges ranging from career issues, relationship issues, coping with academic loads, financial issues, negative emotions and challenges of identity. Lack of guidance and counselling in handling the needs may lead to poor holistic development of the students. Guidance and counselling is offered in the universities to help students resolve difficulties and therefore this study sought to find out the counselling needs of university students.

Persons at young adulthood face challenges in forming relationships. One is overwhelmed by the questions of whether he/she is ready to share live with another and the values and character to look for in the other person. Majority of the students are at young adulthood stage and their past experiences in their families of origin play a great role in answering these questions. Adulthood involves changes in family responsibilities. Availability of new careers options for women, increased educational requirements in the world of work and increased emphasis of personal autonomy has led many young adults to postpone marriage until their late twenties and thirties in order to build their careers (Weiten, 2005). Those that do not postpone are overwhelmed by marital roles, child rearing responsibilities and building of careers which leave them exhausted.

The enormous changes that are taking place in the 21st century are as a result of the advent of formal education, technological development and foreign cultures (Nayak, 2007; Okumu. n.d). Education has brought about new needs such as career choices, transitions from one academic level to another, job placements, economic hardships, technological issues mental health issues, and social and personal developmental issues (Nayak, 2007). When students join universities and colleges for the first time, they are exposed to problems related to transition, orientation, career choice, adjustment and disciplinary restrictions (Muola & Migosi, 2012). Rapid change in work world and labour force, violence in the homes, schools and community, divorce, teenage suicide, sexual experimentation are all challenges that have great negative effects on the personal, social, career and academic development of all learners (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Okumu, (n.d) concurs with this by saying that the changes are leaving the young people in a state of confusion, uncertain of what to do and alienated.

According to Nayak (2007), Egbochuku (2006), Chartuvedi (2004) and Sindabi (1989) the areas that university students seek counselling include; public speaking anxiety, improvement in their study skills, career uncertainty, self confidence problems, lack of motivation, fear of failure, depression, lack of purpose in life, anxiety and nervousness, love and relationships, physical health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, weight, eating problems, time management, overcoming fear about taking exams, meeting career and educational needs; psychological issues such as suicidal and homicidal thoughts, mood changes, phobias, problem solving, marital issues, traumatic life events and life transitions. This study sought to establish if the above counselling needs exist among students in Kenyan universities.

In their study to assess and compare the counselling needs of several sub groups of students at middle East Technical University in Turkey and to investigate the perspectives of the counselling staff about counselling needs of the students and the counselling services, Guneri, Aydin and Skovholt (2003) found in their study that managing ones time, was rated highest in the list of student needs, identifying and planning goals for one's life and concentrating on studies followed next, followed by ending a relationship which took a share of 51% while, getting a job after college took a 50% portion. Knowing self better came lowest in the listing with 35%. The problem of time management among students may be a contributing factor to the increasing incidents of student unrest in the universities. Aluende (2001) states that academic stress among students which is largely brought about by mounting examination fears and academic pressures is a significant factor in most incidents of student unrest not only in Nigerian universities but also in other universities in other countries. In a study of the profile of students attending university of Granada in Spain, Arco, Fernandez, Heilbon and Lopez (2005) revealed that students rated academic needs; getting easily distracted, need to improve their study skills, problem of time management and problem of test taking anxiety as the areas desiring significant attention. This study sought to determine the counselling needs of students in Kenyan universities.

2.1 Career/ Educational Needs

Students are faced by a variety of career/ educational needs as they strive to achieve their academic goals. Some of these career needs are; problems in the choice of careers, fear of failing examinations which leads to anxiety, worries about getting a job related to ones career choice, financing ones education, content overload, poor study habits and skills, poor concentration and understanding of subject content and concerns about some inconsiderate and insensitive lecturers (Egbochuku & Akpan, 2008; Agatha, 2006; Berk, 2005). Egbochuku & Akpan, (2008);

Agatha, (2006); further add that due to scarcity of jobs in the job markets, students, especially the adult students, may tend to pursue different careers from their original careers, they need to be aware of the world of jobs and their rewards; selecting and planning job/occupational choices is a great need among students, they face the challenge of making realistic job/occupational choices, identifying the requirements of appropriate and available jobs and identifying main occupational interests and needs. This study therefore sought to investigate the career needs of students in Kenyan universities.

2.2 Personal Needs

These needs are critical in keeping relationships and maintaining friendships with other people. Nyutu (2006) states that personal needs involves students learning about themselves and others: it includes learning to understand, accept and respect self, developing positive attitudes through identifying, prioritizing and evaluating values, understanding and making appropriate decisions regarding drug and alcohol abuse, tobacco and abuse of other harmful substances, developing respect for cultural diversity, learning how to behave responsibly in the family, school and community at large, develop relationship skills to resolve conflicts in a safe and responsible manner and develop effective ways to cope with violence in order to ensure personal safety (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006) Personal needs are diverse and therefore, impact on the student as an individual, the student and the immediate community in which he/she lives (the family, peers, college and the place of work). This study sought to determine the personal needs of students in the Kenyan universities.

2.3 Life Skills Needs

Life skills include a wide range of knowledge and skill interactions believed to be essential for adult independent living (Santrock, 2005). Some of the life skills needs according to Santrock (2005) include; managing personal finances;-this may include simple things such as; managing ones savings, managing personal budget and keeping records, demonstrating personal finance decision making skills, making responsible expenditures and paying bills among others. The study sought to investigate the life skills needs of students in Kenyan universities.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design: This study adopted descriptive survey research design. In this design the the researcher does not manipulate the variables under study but examines them in their natural state (Orodho, 2003).

3.2 Sampling procedure: Stratified random sampling was used to draw a sample of 385 students. Stratified random sampling is used in situations where the researcher knows some of the variables in the population that are critical to achieving representativeness (Burns & Groove, 1995). Type of university and gender were used as variables for stratification. The 19 universities formed two strata comprising of 7 public and 12 private universities. Using Kathuri and Pals (1993) table, a population of over 100,000 subjects has a minimum sample size of 384 subjects. In this study, the target population is 132,373 and therefore a sample of 384 is appropriate. For representativeness, proportionate sampling was used to distribute the 384 respondents by gender to the six randomly selected universities. Two student counsellors from each selected university were purposively selected, and 15 peer counsellors from each university were included in the study. This made a total sample size of 487 respondents.

3.3 Instruments: Data was collected by use of two questionnaires (student and peer counsellors' questionnaire) and an interview schedule for the student counsellors.

3.4 Data analysis procedure: The researchers ensured that data collected was cleaned before carrying out the analysis. This involved checking unfilled questionnaires, interpreting ambiguous answers and dealing with contradicting data. After cleaning, the researcher formulated a coding scheme whereby codes were assigned to each likely answer. The function of the coding process is to create codes from the responses which can then be summarised and analysed in various ways (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Data was then entered into the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics which included frequencies, percentages, means and averages. Qualitative data generated from open-ended items and interview schedule were organized into themes and summaries and the researchers evaluated the usefulness of the information given by the respondents to the study and thus included in the discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

The objective of the study was to find out the counselling needs of students in Kenyan Universities. The needs were categorised into three; career/educational needs, life skills needs and the personal needs. These three categories have subcategories that the respondents illustrated the level of help they needed in each. Weights and Averages were used whereby; 5 represented 'need a lot of help', 4 'need medium amount of help', 3 'need a

little amount of help', 2 'not need any help in' and 1 'does not apply to me'. Any subcategory that scored a weight and average (WA) of 2.5 and above was noted as a major need while the subcategory that scored less than 2.5 was noted not a minor need in each of the subcategories of the three categories under study. The researchers sought to seek information on career / educational needs of the students in Kenyan universities.

4.1 Career/Education Needs

Career/Educational needs are academic related challenges that affect students as they strive to achieve their goals.

Table 1. Means and Frequencies of Career / Educational Needs

Statement	Doesn't need any help	Does not apply to me	A little help	Medium help	A lot of help	WA
Deciding what to do with my life	22.2%	18.8%	25.6%	23.9%	9.6%	2.80
Learning about job opportunities	44%	26.6%	17.6%	7.3%	4.5%	2.02
Learning more about the educational requirements	32.2%	27.5%	22.7%	13.2%	4.5%	2.30
Developing effective job seeking skills	38.5%	27.5%	17.6%	10.6%	5.9%	2.18
Selecting area of study	13.4%	16.2%	8.4%	30%	21.8%	3.31
Selecting courses necessary	13.1%	17.6%	22.3%	28.5%	8.4%	3.22
Coping with academic difficulties	24.9%	22.4%	23.2%	22.7%	6.7%	2.64

Information on Table 1 show four major and three minor career/educational needs of students in Kenyan universities. The weights and averages (WA) of the major needs are 2.64, 2.80, 3.22 and 3.31. The mean average of all the subcategories under career/educational needs is 2.66; this indicates that career/educational needs are a major need among the students in Kenyan universities. The findings in this study is in agreement with Egbochuku and Akpan (2008), Agatha (2006), and Berk (2005) who states that students are faced by a variety of career needs some of which include choice of careers, content overload, financing ones education, worries about getting a job related to ones career choice and poor study habits. According to Egbochuku and Akpan (2008) educational needs are concerned with learning, study habits that affect the academic performance, concentration, passing examinations and time management. Academic needs are broad and interconnected with career / educational needs. Egbochuku and Akpan (2008) further states that cognitive oriented problems (thinking, remembering, perceiving, concentrating, reasoning and knowing) can lead to a more need for counselling among the students because these problems pose a threat in the academic performance if not addressed.

4.2 Life Skill Needs

Table 2. Weight and Averages (Mean) of Life Skills Needs

Statement	Doesn't need help	Doesn't apply to me	A little help	Medium help	A lot of help	WA
Learning better use of library	13.6%	17.8%	26.5%	30.4%	11.7%	3.09
Identifying strengths, abilities, limitations	18.2%	26.3%	26.5%	21.2%	7.5%	2.74
Developing personal philosophy of life	25.5%	24.1%	23.5%	19.9%	7%	2.59
Learning to handle stress and anxiety	28.1%	24.2%	22%	18.9%	6.7%	2.42
Learning to make decisions	23.4%	25.1%	25.1%	18.4%	4.7%	2.53
Learning to solve personal problems	22.6%	22%	26.5%	22%	7%	2.69
Managing time more effectively	23.7%	23.4%	24.2%	22.6%	6.1%	2.64
Learning to budget wisely	22.9%	20.9%	20.9%	22.1%	7.8%	2.60

The information on Table 2 shows that only one subcategory of life skill needs is not a major need among the students in Kenyan Universities. The mean average (2.66) of all the subcategories under life skills needs shows that life skills is a major need among the students in Kenyan universities. As students transit from adolescence, to young adults and to adulthood, they are faced by various needs that need to be met in order to have a healthy starting of a new stage of life that is presented with different responsibilities and challenges this may lead to a high need for help in life skills. University students need life skills needs to; prepare them for the world of work including expanding their knowledge about careers, develop them as long life learners and help them manage better the transition from university to work, and to ensure their emotional and personal needs are met as well as their academic needs since many students academic performance and level of motivation are affected by personal issues as opposed to purely academic factors (Barnsley, 2009). Santrock (2005) states that through life skills counselling, one is able to develop problem solving techniques, be a critical thinker, develop effective communication skills, have good decision making abilities, be aware of self, be aware of others and develop socially acceptable ways of coping with stress and emotions.

4.3 Personal Needs

Table 3. Weights and Averages of Personal Needs

Statement	Doesn't need help	Doesn't apply to me	A little help	Medium help	A lot of help	WA
Developing & demonstrating confidence	22.9%	26%	32.2%	22.1%	5.8%	2.62
Becoming more self reliant	17.4%	18.2%	24.1%	27.5%	12.9%	3.00
Learning how to use my time appropriately	12.3%	16.2%	23.2%	35.9%	12.3%	3.20
Learning to get better along with people i live with	18.8%	17.7%	24.2%	27.5%	11.8%	2.96
Learning how to make more friends	12.3%	16.2%	23.2%	35.9%	12.3%	3.20
Making my family interested with my studies and career	17.4%	18.2%	24.1%	27.5%	12.9%	3.00
Learning how to live and work with others	21.8%	24.6%	26.3%	20.4%	7%	2.66
Learning how to deal effectively with community problems	24.9%	27.4%	27.1%	14.8%	5.9%	2.50
Coping with discrimination because of my age or disability	16.8%	16.2%	23.7%	20.4%	22.9%	3.16
Learning ways how to stop drug abuse.	14.2%	8.6%	9.7%	16.2%	51.3%	3.82

All the subcategories in the personal needs category are major needs among the students in Kenyan universities. The average mean of all the subcategories under the personal needs is 3.01, an indication that it is a need that faces students more than the life skills and the career/educational needs. Personal needs are critical in keeping relationships and maintaining friendships with other people. When one understands his/her various personal needs he/she is able to appreciate his/her complexities and those of others (Sanrock, 2005). Students may face challenges as they try to cope with the heterogeneity of the university.

5. Conclusion

Students in Kenyan universities are faced by a variety of counselling needs. The researchers found out that the students in Kenyan universities are faced with career/ educational, personal and life skills needs. Students in the Kenyan universities demonstrated a high need for help in Personal needs (WA= 3.01) than career/educational needs (WA=2.66) and life skills needs (WA=2.66).

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