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## **CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING UTILIZATION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES AMONG STUDENTS IN NATIONAL SCHOOLS IN MERU AND THARAKA NITHI COUNTIES, KENYA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Guidance and Counseling is a process of helping the individual find solutions to own problems and accept them. The provision of Guidance and Counseling to all students in secondary schools in Kenya is fundamental to the success of the Government's overall education development strategy. However, various cultural factors may hinder students' willingness to engage counseling services in solving their inherent problems which is still a persistent problem facing education in Kenya. The purpose of this study is to investigate cultural factors affecting utilization of Guidance and Counseling service, among students in national schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya. The study was conducted using descriptive survey research design and the target population was 3702 subjects comprising four head teachers, four Guidance and Counseling teachers and 3694 students. The sample size for this study was 377 respondents comprising four head teachers, four Guidance and Counseling teachers and 369 students selected through purposive and stratified random sampling. The research questionnaires were piloted in two national schools in Embu County and involved two head teachers and two guidance and counseling teachers and four students. Reliability of the questionnaire was tested through test-retest method. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for windows. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data. The study makes the conclusion that Guidance and Counseling in Kenyan secondary schools need to be re-emphasized to address cultural factors that affect its utilization. Involvement of all stakeholders including parents, teachers, and opinion leaders in sensitizing the community to shun factors such as cultural beliefs, taboos and myths in education provision was among the recommendations made. The Ministry of Education should introduce mandatory in-service training in Guidance and Counseling for teacher counselors with no basic training in Guidance and Counseling.

**Keywords:** Counseling; Culture; Guidance; Service; Student Utilization

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Guidance is giving advice or suggestions or directions or instructions to people who have problems, spiritual, social, educational, economic or psychological. Guidance and counseling services prepare students to assume increasing important responsibility for their decisions and growth in their ability to understand and accept the results of their choices (Kauchak, 2011). The ability to make such intelligent choices is not innate but, like other abilities, must be developed. Mutie and Ndambuki (2004) established that few students sought guidance and counseling services in Kenyan schools despite the value that guidance and counseling would bring in alleviating students social problems. Students in secondary schools are faced with challenges which include among others bullying, relationships, drugs and alcohol abuse despite having elaborate Guidance and Counseling programmes running in these schools (Ndondo, 2004). This implies that Guidance and Counseling is not fully utilized to mitigate some of the problems facing learners in national schools. Despite this, little has been done to assess the extent to which Guidance and Counseling services were being utilized by students in National Schools. This study sought to establish the cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling services in National Schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya.

**Statement of the Problem**

Students joining national schools experience personal challenges ranging from cultural shock due to multicultural diversities, unmet expectations, among others, which may lead to erosion of morals. This raises the question as to whether guidance and counseling services are effectively utilized in helping students to adjust to life in a national school. Cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling services have inadequately been explored. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling services among students in National Schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi, Kenya.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find out the cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling services in National Schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties, Kenya.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

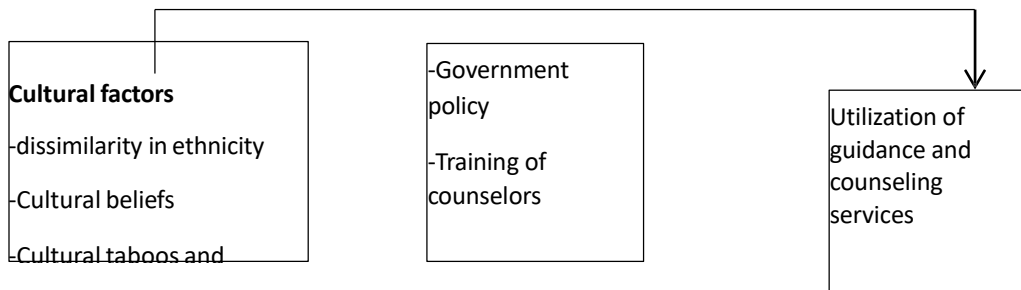
- i) To find out cultural factors affecting the utilization of guidance and counseling services among students in national schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties.
- ii) To determine strategies that can be adopted to enhance utilization of guidance and counselling in national schools Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties.

### Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Cramer (1999) model theory of help seeking behavior. Cramer developed a model specifically for the help-seeking behavior which explains the relationships between variables of distress, social support, attitudes and self-concealment. According to this model, likelihood of seeking counseling is increasing when one has high distress and positive attitudes toward counseling. Distress is higher when individuals refrain from telling personally distressing information and have impaired social support networks. People, who refrain from telling personally distressing information, often have negative attitudes toward counseling and have impaired social support networks. Moreover, attitudes toward counseling are found to be the most salient antecedent for help-seeking. In this study the researcher hypothesizes that attitude toward seeking psychological help are influenced by social and cultural factors. This study will seek to establish the cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling services in National Schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. Understanding the variables that influence an individual's decision to seek guidance and counseling services was essential to trying to help address the psychological health concerns of national school's population given the multicultural diversity.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study

The model used for this study focuses on the variables involved in determining socio-cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling. This is illustrated in Figure 1.



### Relationship between the Study Variables

The independent variables as shown in the Conceptual Framework relates to socio-cultural factors which comprises of social stigma, gender, family influence, cultural beliefs and taboos. Consequently, the dependent variable is utilization of guidance and counseling by students in National schools. It is conceptualized that government policy as well as teacher counselors training may have an influence on the way students partake on guidance and counseling services in schools.

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using descriptive survey research design. As explained by Gall; Borg and Gall (1996), in this design, the researcher does not manipulate the variables under study but instead, examines the variables in their existing condition. Therefore, the searcher conducted the study within the existing students' cultural backgrounds in national schools and the effects these variables have on students' utilization of guidance and counseling. The study was carried out in National Secondary Schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi, counties There are four national schools in the two counties namely Meru School and Saint Mary's Girls' in Meru County and Chogoria Girls' and Ikuu boys' in Tharaka-Nithi County. The target population for the study was 3702 subjects comprising 4 head teachers, 4 guidance and counseling. HODs and 3694 students in four National Schools in Meru and Tharaka Nithi Counties (Meru and Tharaka-Nithi County Education Offices, 2013).

The data collected was cleaned, coded, and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for windows. Martin and Acuna (2002) which yielded descriptive statistics, frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

### Distribution of sample size

Category	Total population	Sampling procedure	Sample	%sample representation
Head teachers	4	Purposive	4	100
C&G HODs	4	Simple random	4	100
Students	1160	Simple random	116	10
Meru school	854	Simple random	85	10
Ikuu Boys	1000	Simple random	100	10
Chogoria Girls'	680	Simple random	68	10
Total	3702		377	

### Summary of Data Analysis Methods

Research Question	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Statistical procedure
What are the cultural factors affecting utilization of guidance and counseling services among students in national schools in Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties?	Cultural factors	Utilization of guidance and counseling	Frequencies percentage and
What strategies can be adopted to enhance utilization of guidance and counseling services by students in national schools in Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties?	strategies	Utilization of guidance and counseling	Frequencies percentage and

### Distribution of Students by Class and Gender

Class	Boys		Girls	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Form 1	37	22.0	35	22.0
Form 2	41	25.0	41	26.0
Form 3	43	26.0	39	25.0
Form 4	45	27.0	43	27.0
Total	166	100.0	158	100.0

### Cultural Factors Affecting Utilization of Guidance and Counseling Services

The objective of the study aimed at finding out cultural factors affecting the utilization of guidance and counseling services among students in national schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties. The findings obtained from teachers and students are shown in Table below.

The results in the above table shows that 67% of the teacher respondents strongly agreed and 13% agreed that deep rooted community beliefs regarding school guidance and counseling services held by the students affected how they utilized the service. However, 20% were undecided. The responses from students also show that 34% strongly agreed, 45% agreed, 7% undecided, 8% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed on the same issue. Culturally rooted traditions and practices carry important consequences for willingness to seek guidance and counseling services. The finding of this study are congruent with those of Rowe and LaFromboise (1996) who found that differences in racial and ethnic backgrounds impact upon people's commitment to seek guidance and counseling services hence some students tend to resist these services because they are not part of their culture.

On whether ethnic dissimilarity between students and teacher counselor had an influence on the students' utilization of guidance and counseling services in national schools, the results show that 55% of the teachers strongly agreed and 45% agreed respectively. Similarly, 46% of the student responses strongly agreed, 9% agreed, 13% were undecided; three percent disagreed, while 29% strongly disagreed. The results in Table 9 show that both teachers and students reported that religious beliefs regarding guidance and counseling held by students influenced the way they sought guidance and counseling in schools. Supporting this, were 47% teachers and 39% students that strongly agreed. Twelve percent teachers and 21% students agreed, 18 and nine percent teachers and students respectively

were non-committal. Further, 13% of the teachers and 11% of the student respondents disagreed while 10 and 20 percent of the teachers and student's responses strongly disagreed.

### Teachers' and Students Responses on Effect of Cultural Factors on the Utilization of Guidance and Counseling Services

cultural factors	Teachers' Responses					Students' Responses				
	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
Deep rooted community beliefs regarding school guidance and counseling services	67	13	20	0	0	34	45	7	8	6
Ethnic dissimilarity between students and teacher counselor	55	45	0	0	0	46	9	13	3	29
Religious beliefs regarding guidance and counseling	47	12	18	13	10	39	21	9	11	20
Taboos and myths regarding guidance and counseling on certain issues	49	21	3	11	16	67	14	6	9	4

Regarding influence of taboos on students' utilization of guidance and counseling, the results show that 49 and 67 percent of the teachers and students strongly agreed, 21% teachers agreed while 14% students also agreed. The result further shows that three percent teachers and six percent students were undecided. Eleven percent of the teachers and nine percent of the students disagreed. Sixteen percent of the teachers and four percent of the students strongly disagreed. National schools bring together a mixture of students from all over the country, with diverse sociocultural backgrounds. In a secondary school setting, taboos entrenched in the society are some of the cultural issues that may disturb students and also influence their uptake of counseling services. Therefore, it is the counselor's knowledge on how to handle these problems that will make counseling effective in order to assist the student to acquire their social and personal competences hence enhancing their academic development (Mwangi, 2004). The taboos associated with talking about sex and knowledge of sex act as barriers to seeking knowledge of reproductive health (Lwagula, 2006).

### Strategies to Enhance Utilization. of Guidance and Counseling Services

This objective sought to determine strategies that can be adopted to enhance utilization of guidance and counseling services by students in national schools in Meru and Tharaka-Nithi Counties. The responses elicited from the teachers and students are captured in the table below;

### Strategies to Enhance Utilization of Guidance and Counseling

Strategies	Teachers' responses					Students' Responses				
	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %	SA %	A %	UN %	D %	SD %
Developing SGC services that reflects understanding of cultural diversity	87	13	0	0	0	71	21	2	7	0
Guidance and counseling be made an examinable subject	78	9	5	4	4	8	12	14	34	22
More advocacy on the importance of guidance and counseling	89	11	0	0	68	23	11	2	10	6
Improve personal qualities of teacher counselors through in service training	86	14	0	0	0	48	14	12	18	8

From the results shown above, more than 80% of the teachers and 70% of the students suggested strongly that curriculum developers should develop a school guidance and counseling service that reflects understanding of cultural diversity. This would enhance utilization of the services as a result of multicultural competency. The results show that majority (78%) of the teachers said that guidance and counseling be made an examinable subject. This probably would increase the level of uptake of guidance and counseling in schools. However, the results indicate that students were of the contrary opinion as majority (34%) of them disagreed while 22% strongly disagreed

The results shown in Table 10 indicate that more advocacies on the importance of guidance and counseling would probably change the students' attitude towards utilizing guidance and counseling services. Nyamwaka, Ondima and Nyamwange (7013) suggested that the school guidance counselor should mobilize other teachers to in creating awareness and advising students on the importance of seeking guidance and counseling services and counseling. The existing school counselors should create awareness of the existing counseling services by giving it a wider publicity in rural schools so as to improve students' attitude towards the services. Students should be motivated through conferences, seminars and workshop on the need to participate in guidance and counseling activities for proper self and academic adjustment and development of healthy and positive attitude.

Responses from both teachers and students' show that utilization of guidance and counseling services in schools can be enhanced by improving teacher counselors' qualities. This can be done through in-service training of teacher counselors. Gelso (2007) suggested that counselors should improve their personal qualities since these also relate to students' willingness to seek counseling. Gelso further posited that The Ministry of Education should introduce mandatory in-service training in guidance and counseling for all teacher counselors who do not have basic training in guidance and counseling.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study makes the conclusion that:

Guidance and Counseling in Kenyan secondary schools need to be emphasized to address cultural factors such as ethnicity that brings about differences in cultural diversity, deep rooted cultural practices, community beliefs, taboos and myths may be prohibiting students from seeking guidance and counseling.

A variety of strategies such as developing school Guidance and Counseling be made an examinable subject and spearheading advocacy on the importance of guidance and counseling and teacher-counselor training.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the fact that guidance and counseling services play a significant role in enhancing behavior of students in national schools due to the multiethnic diversity, researcher makes the following recommendation:

- i) Involvement of all stakeholders including parents, teachers, opinion leaders in sensitizing the community to shun social issues such as social stigma, gender stereotyping and negative attitudes associated with help-seeking.
- ii) There is need to plead with the students to avoid cultural inclinations such as ethnicity, deep rooted cultural practices, community beliefs, taboos and myths that otherwise deter them from seeking guidance and counseling.
- iii) There is need to make Guidance and Counseling an examinable subject, enhance advocacy and mandatory in-service training in guidance and counseling for all teacher counselors who do not have basic training in guidance and counseling.

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