

# The State of Guidance and Counseling Services in Southwest Ethiopia Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** - The purpose of this study was to examine the state of guidance and counseling at secondary schools of southwest Ethiopia. The study followed a qualitative design approach in which the respondents of the study selected by availability sampling technique. A total of 24 participants (8 school guidance and counseling officials, 8 school principals and 8 weredas education bureau experts) were interviewed on the current state of guidance and counseling services to students. In this study, data were analyzed using qualitative techniques. As the result of the study show, among the selected 18 secondary schools only 8 had counseling centers, and among the 8 secondary schools which have guidance and counseling centers, only 4 schools had professionally trained service providers. Thus, significant numbers of secondary school students were in a disadvantage to benefit the services of school guidance and counseling for many of the problems they encounter in relation to personal and academic matters. The qualitative data obtained by interviewing the school principals, counselors, and weredas education bureau experts revealed that the services of school guidance and counseling to be highly threatened by the lack of furnished counseling office, required equipment, professionally trained counselor, support from stakeholders, manuals and job descriptions that clearly indicate the services of guidance and counseling officers. Therefore, this study suggests the staffing of secondary schools with professionally trained guidance and counseling officers, making the services of guidance and counseling available to all students who encounter problems related to academic and personal lives. Moreover, attention should be given to the preparation of service manual and job description for school guidance and counseling personnel. In addition, there need to be continuous professional development training, transparent performance appraisal schemes and service improvement strategy for the personnel working in the field of school guidance and counseling.

**Index Terms:-** Guidance and counseling services, trained professional, secondary schools

## Introduction

The purpose of guidance and counseling service is to impart specific skills and learning opportunities in a proactive

and preventive manner which ensures that all students can achieve school success through academic, career, and personal/social development (American School Counselor Association, 1997). Guidance and counseling service at schools is believed to be effective when it solves the students academic, social and personal problems and also contributes in improving academic performance. High quality school counseling services can help to address students' mental health needs. As discussed by Arudo, Tobias Opiyo Okeyo (2008), school guidance and counseling interventions positively contributes to school behaviors; specifically, students on-task and productive use of time and students in-class discipline. Therefore, guidance and counseling services play a pivotal role in helping students gain the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be able to make good decisions regarding their post-secondary plans.

When guidance and counseling services are absent in schools, students adaptation and having better performance becomes difficult thus leading to low performance, misbehavior and dropout. According to Odeke's (1996), opinion without sound guidance and counseling, many students loose direction and engage themselves in bad behaviors such as drug abuse and alcohol indulgence, missing classes and dropout. On the other hand, guidance and counseling services gain only when necessary materials and required resources fulfill. In the words of (Wahib, 1974 p. 25) the manpower role of the school guidance and counselor is best fulfilled when he/she provides the student with the type of help that can allow the student to understand oneself, abilities, and future career interests.

According to the US Department of Education (2003), the availability of program schedule and staff roles and responsibilities are very crucial for the effective implementation of guidance and counseling programs. Adediran, (1995) stressed that before the organization and administration of guidance and counseling units in schools, the counselor must be fully aware of the functions of the services and other significant programs of the school. The American School Counseling Association (2007) states that for the success on the functions of services, school counselors should spend at least 70 % of their time offering direct service to students guidance and counseling needs. On the other hand, the implementation of contemporary school counseling programs can be difficult without the appropriate amount of support from administration and faculty. Many times, school counselors are told what to do by principals who fail to understand the contribution of the service to school improvement and student well-being (House & Hayes, 2002). School

principals show a tendency to assign guidance officers on a non guidance and counseling duties. In this regard, Beale (2004) points to one factor that contributes to the difficulty in program implementation the pressure on guidance and counseling personnel to perform non-counseling duties.

Another big obstacle to the service of guidance and counseling at schools is the lack of formal professional training and continuous in-service skill upgrading training for school counselors. As Oladele (1987) asserts, the quality of school guidance and counseling service to depend a great deal on the professional preparation and training of the counselors. For school counselors to become contributors to educational reform and enhance student success, counselor training programs will require a transformation of both preparation and practice

(Paisley & Hayes, 2003). Kafwa (2005) suggests the need for systematic short term in-service courses which should be conducted on a continuous basis, more so in the wake of any revision of national development objectives and priorities.

A professional guidance counselor has a significant role to play in the design and delivery of the Comprehensive School Guidance and Counseling Program. The guidance counselor must be a licensed teacher with graduate-level training in counseling who assists students, parents, teachers, and school administrators by providing counseling, consulting, coordinating and program management (Comprehensive guidance and counseling program, 2007). As research reports show, professional school guidance and counseling are not well developed in many developing countries including Ethiopia (Erguner-Tekinalp, Leuwerke, and Terz, 2010; Low, Kok and Lee, 2013). In Africa in particular, it is still at an early stage of development (Mahlangu, 2011). It faces many problems, such as lack of proper understanding of its contribution for school improvement and success and there is also an acute shortage of professionally trained counselors. Until recently, the situation in Ethiopia was not much different than other African countries.

According to Ifelunni (2005) in secondary school setting there are problems related with non-professionalization of counselors, low counselor/student ratio and lack of recognition from the school administrators toward guidance and counseling services. In the words of Adane (2015), lack of commitment and creativity by professionals to promote the profession in the school is mentioned as the major challenge. In line with this Yusuf (1998) has said that in schools some professionals lack professional preparations and motivation to render guidance and counseling services.

As many scholars have show, school counselors help to make learning a positive experience for every student. They are sensitive to individual differences. They know that a classroom environment that is good for one child is not necessarily good for another. Counselors facilitate communication among teachers, parents, administrators, and students to adapt the school environment in the best interests of each individual student. They help individual students make the most of their school experiences and prepare them for the future.

It has been pointed out that no school system in Africa can claim to provide quality education when the majority of secondary school students have no access to guidance and counseling services as integral component of their curriculum

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(Mwamwenda, 2004, p.463). When guidance and counseling services are missing in schools, the student's adaptation becomes difficult, thus leading to low academic performance, misbehavior and dropout of school.

As a number of research results indicated school guidance and counseling services are challenged in different ways. Among the challenges faced lack of separate guidance and counseling room with necessary materials, lack of coordination from stakeholders and lack of clear rule and regulation on how to provide the services. Therefore, the current questions in the context of the study area are (1) Whether guidance and counseling office and service providing personnel are available at the secondary schools and (2) the extent of which guidance and counseling service providers at the secondary schools are professionally trained.

### **Research Method of the study**

#### **Study design**

In the current study, a qualitative design was used to investigate the state of secondary schools Guidance and Counseling services provisions in south west Ethiopia.

#### **Study area**

The study area was four zones (Benchi Maji, Kefa, Jimma and Iluabbor zone) south west Ethiopia secondary schools.

#### **Study population**

The population of the study were include experts working on guidance and counseling services, secondary school principals and educational bureau experts working in study area.

#### **Sampling and sampling techniques**

8 guidance and Counselors, 8 secondary school principals and 8 educational bureau officers were selected using availability sampling techniques.

#### **Instruments of data collection**

##### **Interviews**

Three research instruments were used, namely, in-depth interviews with guidance counselors and school heads and in-depth interview with weredas education bureau experts. Through the in-depth interview, guidance counselors were estimated to address a number of issues which included their own preparedness for leading the development and implementation of the guidance and counseling programme, the content of the programme, activities developing out of the programme, and how they documented the guidance-related curricula and other guidance-related activities in the school. The interviews also sought to establish what impact the guidance counselors believed their programmes had on student behavior and performance.

For the heads of schools, the in-depth interviews sought to gather information on the role they played in the origin and management of the guidance and counseling programme in their schools. These interviews were also interested in what the heads of schools believed were the benefits and disadvantages of the guidance and counseling programmes, their attitudes to guidance and counseling programmes, and the resources the school put aside for supporting the guidance and counseling programmes.

In addition, weredas education bureau experts were interviewed concerning the guidance and counseling services

provisions, policies, rules and responsibilities professions and performance evaluation and mechanism supporting professions.

**Data collection procedures**

To conduct the research on selected secondary schools found in south west Ethiopia; permission to carry out the study was obtained from Jimma university education and behavioral Sciences college research and post graduate coordination office. This was followed by visits to selected weredas education office to inform aims of research and to request permission to conduct the study in the schools. The wereda education experts were interviewed. The wereda education administrators were ordered supervisors to contact schools principals then the principals were interviewed. Lastly the heads of schools were then asked to connect the researchers with the guidance counselors in their respective schools.

**Data analysis**

Qualitative analysis was done for data collected from counselors, school principals and zonal/weredas educational bureau experts.

**Ethical consideration**

The collection data from respondents were based on willingness. Then, the purposes of the study were explained for the participants and they were asked their consent in responding to question in the questionnaire. The participants were also informed that the information provided would only be used for the study purposes and that it would not be given to a third part. Accordingly, information which the participants provide would be used only for the study purposes. In addition, the researchers would be insured confidentiality by making the participants anonymous.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The Aim of the current study is to investigate the state of guidance and counseling services in South West Ethiopia Secondary Schools. In the present chapter, the data generated from the current study is presented and discussed in line with of the -research questions.

**PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY**

**The main research questions raised in the study were:**

1. Whether guidance and counseling office and service providing personnel are available at the secondary schools?
2. The extent of which guidance and counseling service providers at the secondary schools are professionally trained.

**Availability of guidance and Counseling Centers and Professional Counselors**

Table below showed the Existences of guidance and counseling services programs as well as professional experts in respected school.

School 2	Yes	Civic	Teaching and Counseling	No
School 3	Yes	-	-	-
School 4	Yes	Psychology*	Teaching and Counseling	-
School 5	No	-	-	-
School 6	No	-	-	-
School 7	Yes	Afan Oromo	Teaching and Counseling	-
School 8	No	-	-	-
School 9	No	-	-	-
School 10	Yes	Special Need	Counseling	No
School 11	No	-	-	-
School 12	No	-	-	-
School 13	Yes	Psychology *	Counseling	No
School 14	Yes	Psychology*	Counseling	No
School 15	No	-	-	-
School 16	Yes	Information Science	Teaching and Counseling	-
School 17	No	-	-	-
School 18	No	-	-	-

As above table revealed, among selected 18 secondary schools only 8 secondary schools have counseling centers. Among secondary schools having guidance and counseling center, only four secondary schools have psychology background personnel while in remaining four schools civic and ethical study, Afan Oromo, Special Need and Inclusive education and Information Science backgrounds teachers working as Guidance and counseling Officers respectively. Other 10 secondary schools didn't have both counseling center and guidance and counseling officers. The students in the ten schools were in a disadvantage because they were not benefiting the services of guidance and counseling for both personal and academic related problems they encounter. This again, is very common in most of the public secondary schools in the area. The majority of practicing school counselors and teachers as counselors reported still have teaching responsibilities over and above counseling duties.

All counselor and teachers as counselors did not have any on job training that help to improve the profession. This data revealed that in most of sample selected secondary schools of study had no counseling center as well as professional counselor who assist students regarding to their personal, academic and social/relationship problems. The interview held with educational bureau and secondary schools principals indicated that governments not assigning school guidance and counselor officers at current time.

**Counselor Readiness**

To address issues related with the readiness of guidance and counseling service personnel the interview were conducted with school principals and counselors and the interview result showed that secondary schools guidance and counseling services were not established. Schools that have the guidance and counseling services programs, the programs officers were not actively working due to lack of knowledge, supports and training and skills that make them effectives. The interview held

Schools	Counseling center	Counseling officer Education background	Current Duty	On Job Training
School 1	Yes	Psychology*	Teaching and Counseling	No

with wereda educational bureau confirmed that they know only the name guidance and counseling but no any written documents and manuals as well as how to supervise and assess the program at all. The interview results from school principals, counselors and wereda education bureau officers shows as there is no clear mission and legislation that guide, rule and assess the effective the guidance and counseling services and also there is no professional readiness like having skills, knowledge and abilities to provide effective services from programs offices.

The interview results gathered data from principals and counselor were showed their schools guidance and counseling services was challenged by lack of separate guidance and counseling room with necessary materials, lack of coordination from teachers and lack of clear rule and supervision mechanisms from Ministry of education as general and specifically lack guide and support from wereda educational bureau and school community.

## **Discussion of the Study**

### **Research Question 1: What is the existence of guidance and counseling services centers and professional counselors?**

Among selected 18 secondary schools only 8 secondary schools have counseling centers. Among secondary schools having guidance and counseling center, only four secondary schools have psychology background personnel while in remaining four schools guidance and counseling officers were from different fields of study. The current study is similar with Yirgalem Alemu (2013) finding that revealed almost all of secondary schools of east harerge (except one) not had guidance and counseling officer. Also Comfort (2013) reported that on evaluation of the status of guidance services in secondary schools in rivers state, Nigeria show out of the secondary schools in the state almost all does not have a counseling center.

The majority of practicing school counselors and teachers as counselors reported still have teaching responsibilities over and above counseling duties. This finding agree with findings of Yirgalem, (2013) mentioned that most school guidance and counselors reported that they did not have private counseling room as well as most school principals and other officials wanted the Guidance and Counseling program to focus on education related issues like study skills, discipline and late coming. With the absence of clear roles and responsibilities of Guidance and Counseling programs, most visited guidance and counselors were expected to serve as unit leaders. Rashid, Salima ,Mubashir, Ali and Kashif (2011) also stated the role and responsibility of the counselor in educational institutions is much complex as compared to other organizations since there are legal, professional and organizational issues involved in counseling process

Interview conducted with school principals and teachers counselors reported that teachers who were working as guidance and counseling programs officers were not actively working because while most of them were not trained in counseling profession they lacked understanding, skills and knowledge that make them effective in enhances students' academic, career and personal competencies. One of the strengths of Guidance and

Counseling program in schools was availability of trained counselors. Most visited school counselors had no training related to guidance and counseling. This is in line with what Oladele (1987) observed. According to him the quality of counseling services rendered depends a great deal on the training of the counselors. However, comprehensive guidance and counseling program, (2007) underline secondary schools guidance counselor must be a licensed teacher with graduate-level training in counseling who assists students, parents, teachers, and school administrators by providing counseling, consulting, coordinating and program management.

### **Research Question 2: What are the extents of professional preparation among guidance and counseling officers at the secondary schools?**

Most of sample selected schools guidance and counseling officer were not actively working due to non professionalism and lack of knowledge, support, training and skills that make them effective. In other hand all counselor and teachers as counselors did not have any on job training that help to improve the profession. Grace and Teresa, (2015) mentioned the essence of the guidance and counseling program consists of knowledge and attitudes. Training therefore is a central theme. He also described as from training; counselors acquire skills and knowledge which they should be able to use in the school guidance and counseling situation. The founding also supported with Ifelunni (2005) saying in secondary school setting there are problems related with non-professionalization of counselors, low counselor/student ratio and lack of recognition from the school administrators toward guidance and counseling services. In the words of Adane (2015), lack of commitment and creativity by professionals to promote the profession in the school is mentioned as the major challenge. In line with this Yusuf (1998) has said that in schools some professionals lack professional preparations and motivation to render guidance and counseling services. But according to words of Paisley & Hayes, (2003) for school counselors to become contributors to educational reform and enhance student success, counselor training programs will require a transformation of both preparation and practice.

## **Conclusions**

Among selected 18 secondary schools only 8 secondary schools have counseling centers. Among secondary schools having guidance and counseling center, only four secondary schools have psychology background personnel while in remaining four schools guidance and counseling officers were from different fields of study. This implies that most secondary schools find in south west Ethiopia were not providing effective G&C services because most of secondary schools were the lack of G&C centers and programs officers.

While most of secondary schools guidance and counseling officer were non professional; existed G&C officers were not actively working due to non professionalism and lack of knowledge, supports and training and skills that make them effective. Thus non-professionalism and lack of training for G&C personnel leads to limited practices of G&C services in south west Ethiopia secondary schools.



## Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are forwarded

- Since most schools lacks professional counselors and counseling centers, the respective educational bureaus should work on the means of making the services accessible to all schools.
- Among secondary schools having guidance and counseling centers majority of G&C centers were run by non-professional without any training. So, responsible educational bureau should arrange and give them on job training that help to improve their skills.
- More resources both financial and non-financial should be availed to schools by the Ministry of Education and Sports, parents, the community and Non-Governmental Organizations especially to schools in rural areas to enable teachers offer counseling services to the students.

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