Beneficiaries' satisfaction with the School Counselling Services in Namibia: A case study of a selected region

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Abstract

The study investigated the education stakeholders' (beneficiaries') satisfaction with the school counselling services provided to them and their families. The study employed a mixed methods approach, hence both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The population studied consisted of 288 learners, 142 principals, 68 teacher-counsellors and five parents from schools in Ohangwena region. Questionnaires and interviews (in-depth individual one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) were used to gather data. Quantitative data were analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data were analysed by the use of themes and coding. The study revealed that the beneficiaries were satisfied with the educational, personal/social, and career services, but were dissatisfied with consultation and referral services. It also emerged from the study that parents felt left out and not well enlightened on the value of school counselling services. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher-counsellors regularly hold awareness raising activities on school counselling services to educate parents and other stakeholders on the significance of these services and advocate for the needs of all learners.

Keywords: *Stakeholders, School Counselling Programme, Principals, Teacher-counsellors, Learners, Parents*

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INTRODUCTION

Namibian society is plagued with social problems such as poverty, domestic violence, unemployment, HIV & AIDS, and alcohol and drug abuse (Ministry of Education, Management Information System, [EMIS] 2009). Records from the Ministry of Education (2008) indicate that 157,372 or 27% of learners are orphans; while another 99,459 or 17% are vulnerable in that they need special care and protection due to their dysfunctional homes and poverty. In addition, the country experiences an average of about 12,800 or 2% drop-outs annually with 1,735 or 14% of these due to teenage or early pregnancies (Education Management Information System, [EMIS] 2009). These problems are not, however, unique to Namibia. There is also an increase in the divorce rate and in the number of single-parent families in Namibia and all over the world which is also constitutes a stress factor for learners (Chireshe, 2011). Not only do the ever-increasing needs of children and the expectations of today's society impose growing demands on educational systems, but schools are also expected to find solutions and respond to these needs by providing counselling services to all learners to promote effective learning. For some school-going children, schools are the only places where they can find solace, support, safety, counselling and learning - a home away from home (Education Management Information System, [EMIS] 2009). Gora, Swatzky and Hague (1992), cited in Chireshe, (2011, p.101), state that the increase in 'diverse learner problems and the current economic situation have made the need for effective counselling services even more critical than in the past'. In addition, Mapfumo (2001) asserts that learners experience immense psychological pressures in today's digital era, whereas UNESCO (2002) argues that the HIV&AIDS pandemic has orphaned millions of learners rendering their future uncertain as orphanhood in turn leads to poverty. Apart from academic difficulties learners experience in schools, they further suffer from psycho- social, vocational and personal-social problems. The growing number of social, economic and family problems necessitated and provided the rationale for the introduction of school counselling programmes in all Namibian schools in 1996. To further strengthen the capacity of the school counselling programme to meet these needs, the government of Namibia, in 1996, directed that the regional offices of the Ministry of Education appoint Regional School Counsellors and other specialist education support personnel to coordinate the school counselling

activities in the schools of each region (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The overall goal of the Namibian School Counselling Programme is the 'total development' of learners (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.1). To achieve this goal the school counselling programme features activities directed at training in skills and abilities for social, educational, vocational, moral and psychological development of learners. The approach to school counselling is as an educational process meant for the development of learners so that they can adjust appropriately to life, especially in adulthood and during the working stage of their lives. Thus school counselling as conceived by Namibia is, therefore, not an impromptu service or service that needs to occur once. As an educational process, school counselling is designed to promote the psychological maturity or total development of a healthy personality in every learner. It is of great importance that schools prepare learners to assume responsibility for their decisions and grow in their ability to understand and accept the results of their choices (Gibson, 2008). The ability to make intelligent choices is not innate, but like other abilities, must be developed through school counselling services. Hence, this study sought to determine the satisfaction of the beneficiaries with counselling services in Ohangwena region. Satisfaction refers to the fulfillment of a need or desire, or contentment derived from the services provided (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

School counselling provision in schools addresses the humanistic aspect of learning. Humanism posits that individuals have a potential to grow from learning (Huitt, 2001). Humanism thus is aligned with the study of human needs and interests. People are capable and autonomous, with the ability to self-actualize and realize their best potential as well as change their lives positively according to the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011). Guidance and counselling programmes promote self-reliance, independence and develop learners' ability to take active responsibility for their own learning. The study adopted a humanistic approach to learner support service implementation to determine the satisfaction of the beneficiaries with the school counselling services provided to them and their families. School counselling as a concept

relies on the humanistic theory that states that humans have inherent capacity to grow in a positive direction and to realize their own potential if given opportunity or appropriate resources to experience self-awareness and self-empowerment (Egbochuku, 2008; Miller, Fruehling & Lewis, 1978). In other words, humanism is a school of thought that believes in the potential of people to grow from learning and therefore gives preference to the study of human needs and interests (Corey, 1996; Shumba, Mpofu, Seotlew & Montsi, 2011). Carl Rogers, one of the contributors to the humanistic approach, views people as capable and autonomous, with the ability to realize their potentials and change their lives in positive ways. Rogers believes that humans are basically good and trustworthy and that they can be trusted to direct their own lives (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011). Some of Roger's keys to helping people, involve creating a facilitative climate, helping people explore their feelings, and assisting them to work towards goals that they have selected. These are mirrored in the school counselling programme as it develops a caring, supportive and encouraging classroom climate that supports learners 'efforts to reach their self-selected goals, as well as provides learners with fundamental skills associated with successful performance in academics, relationships, and in self-regulation (Villares et al., 2011).

Every individual human being has the ability to be successful in life and to try to make the most of their potential, a process that is called self-actualization (Cain, 2001; Maslow, 1970). Therefore, that humans are viewed positively as good, is an optimistic starting point on the part of the school counselling programme. The human being's natural capacity for growth and development is a vital characteristic on which school counselling services focus for the learners to reach self-actualization.

The researchers' view is that school counselling services expose learners to many experiences through which they are equipped with decision-making skills or the abilities to make decisions, manage their lives and become self-actualized. Similarly, the school counselling programme empowers learners to make informed choices in life, as a result of educational gains made from counselling services. It must be understood that school counselling does not make decisions or choices for individuals, but rather helps individuals to make choices in such a way as to promote or stimulate gradual to make decisions independently without or with minimum assistance from others.

At the same time, the school counselling programme provides learners with an opportunity to realize and to know what they are capable or not capable of doing. The school counselling programme assists learners to know what opportunities exist in their environment which they can take advantage of and use to the best of their abilities, and to recognize other resources at their disposal. The school counselling programme provides each individual learner with an opportunity for self-awareness, understanding and appreciation of the differences between one individual and other individuals; understand each individual person's emotions and intellectual processes that influence his/her behaviour, and a chance to select their own goals and objectives from the many within his/her view and to review periodically his/her progress towards these goals (Villares et al., 2011).

In this connection, the Namibian school counselling programme provides opportunities for the individual learner to reach his/her full potential by facilitating the educational, vocational, personal and emotional development (Ministry of Education, 2007). Teacher-counsellors are expected to establish a school and classroom atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable to consider new ideas and are not threatened by external factors. Bohart (2003) asserts that school counselling programmes use the humanistic notion of making schools more responsive and relating to human beings in a more growth-producing way. Ultimately, every learner acquires new techniques that lead to success in the areas of educational/ academic, social- relations and self-management. Likewise, in fostering the development of the whole person, the school counselling programme provides a healthier environment for emotional growth, an environment where needs are understood and responded to with care and respect (Hui, 2002). In this way, learners feel free to express their feelings and share opinions without fear of being intimidated and discriminated against. Through sharing and communicating with peers, learners expand their knowledge, deepen their understanding, gain insights and strengthen their potential (Lunenburg, 2010; Cooley, 2010). Assertion by Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) is that these sharing activities are directly linked to the humanistic principle that creativity is a powerful force; holistic approaches are more powerful than reductionist ones, and a sense of purpose is the primary influence on human behaviour. Hence, the use of this theory in the problem under investigation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a mixed method design. Used together, qualitative and quantitative approaches represent a complementary component of scientific and disciplinary inquiry; hence the two methods were used to complement each other (Shumba, Mpofu, Seotlew & Montsi, 2011). The research study involved understanding human experiences and behaviour tendencies. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed in order to study all dimensions of the participants' behaviour and provide comprehensive data for the understanding of the participants' perspectives on the services provided to them (Creswell, 2009; Neuman, 2011; Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). Johnson and associates (n.d) are also of the view that multiple approaches to data collection assist researchers to map out more fully the richness and complexity of behaviour under investigation, thus making its study from more than one perspective possible. The study, therefore, is both analytical and interpretive as it tried to analyse and understand different stakeholders' behaviour tendencies, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions regarding their understanding or interpretation of the effects of the school counselling services on the recipients of the programme.

Sampling procedure

The study employed both purposive and stratified sampling to select 148 schools because the three categories of circuits (best, average and poor performing circuits) were not equal in numbers or sizes of their populations. Some circuits within the region are relatively small; thus, one could not expect an equal number of schools from the circuits that took place in this study. The stratified sampling was used to ensure that members of each category of circuits were well represented.

Quantitative Sample

A sample is a selected small collection of units that closely represents features of interests on a larger collection of cases called population (Neuman, 2011). For this reason, the sample of participants for this study consisted of a sample size of 600 respondents; thus, 382 learners, 148 school principals and 70 teacher-counsellors, all were

given questionnaires but only 288 learners, 68 teacher-counsellors and 142 principals returned useable questionnaires. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), stratification is the process of dividing the population into strata according to study factors. It was necessary to employ stratification in this quantitative sampling because circuits were not equal in numbers or sizes of their populations.

Qualitative Sample

This study also employed qualitative sampling where three school principals and five parents were sampled for individual interviews and 12 teacher-counsellors and 15 learners were selected for focus group interviews using the purposive sample technique. Purposive sampling, according to Merriam (1998), is based on the premise that the researcher desires to discern, understand and gain insight into phenomena under investigation; therefore, the researcher must select a sample from which the most can be learned and obtain participants with unique expertise. The main reason behind purposive sampling is to select information-rich participants who have first-hand experience in the field under investigation. This sampling enables the researcher to obtain in-depth and rich information for the study. The sample size of 35 participants for individual interviews and focus group interviews was considered more than enough for the study because for the phenomenological studies, sample size recommendations range from 6 to 10 for qualitative research (Mason, 2010; Aloka, 2012).

Research Instrumentation

The study used the most common instruments such as questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. The rationale of using the different forms of data collection allowed for multiple sources of evidence and avoided the danger of bias in relying on one source.

Procedures for data collection

The necessary ethical requirements of a study that involves human

subjects were observed. In each participating school and with the assistance of the school principal, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the conditions for participation both orally and in writing. For instance, prior to participation, respondents were assured of their anonymity, the confidentiality of information they were to give as well as the voluntary consent to electronic recording of interviews, nature of their participation and the fact that, if they so wished, they could withdraw at any time from the study.

Data Analysis

Bertram and Christiansen (2015) define data analysis as the process of ordering and structuring research data. Content and thematic analyses were used to analyse data for this study. Data were analysed thematically as described by Creswell (2010). The approach consists of six steps. They include: familiarizing with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Verbatim quotations were used to support findings from the study. The data from the questionnaire were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Thus, respondents' mean scores were calculated, analysed and interpreted.

RESULTS

Quantitative data findings

The three principals, teacher-counsellors and learners population groups, as beneficiaries of Namibian School Counselling Programme services, were to indicate their satisfaction with the services of Namibian School Counselling Programme they have received or witnessed being implemented. The participants were to respond along a five-point Likert-type scale in terms of the extent or degree of satisfaction with particular identified service of the Namibian school counselling Programme. Minimum scale mean response score to this section of the questionnaire is 1, while maximum is 5. Therefore, mean response scores ranging from 1–2 indicate very strong dissatisfaction with the service. Mean response score ranging from 2–3 indicate dissatisfaction, 3–4 moderate satisfaction while mean response

scores ranging from 4–5 indicate very strong satisfaction with the service's implementation or impact. The results of data analysis are presented in Table 1.1 below**.**

Table 1.1: Participants' mean scores on satisfaction of stakeholders with the Namibian School Counselling Services (NSCP)

Sections on the questionnaire	Response Scores of groups of participants in means and standard deviations		
Satisfaction of stakeholders with Services of the NSCP	**Learners**	**Teacher-Counsellors**	**Principals**
1. Counselling Services	3.90(1.28)	4.26(0.86)	4.32(0.87)
2. Career Planning Services	3.10(0.61)	3.08(0.57)	3.28(0.55)
3. Educational Services (Information -based services)	3.48(1.34)	4.11(0.98)	318(0.79)
4. Academic develop-ment Services	3.13(1.12)	2.91(0.59)	3.18(0.58)
5. Consultation Services	4.08(0.94)	2.69(0.91)	3.98(0.89)
6. Referral Services	3.14(0.51)	2.94(0.54)	3.10(0.49)
Total mean score	**3.63(0.96)**	**3.49(0.74)**	**3.67(0.69)**

Participants' responses regarding their satisfaction with implementation of counselling services of the Namibian School Programme revealed mean response scores of 3.90 for learners, 4.26 for teacher-counsellors and 4.32 for principals. These results indicate that the three population groups expressed satisfaction with counselling service as implemented by the Namibian School Counselling Programme. While the learners expressed fairly moderate satisfaction the teacher-counsellors and the principals were very satisfied with the counselling services.

With regards to career planning services, learners' mean response score is 3.10, teacher-counsellors' mean score is 3.08, and principals' mean score is 3.28, These results indicate that the participants were only moderately satisfied with the implementation of the career planning services of the Namibian School Counselling Programme.

Educational or Information dissemination services of the Namibian School Counselling Programme received mean satisfaction response scores of 3.48 for learners, 4.11 for teacher-counsellors and 4.18 for the principals. The results indicate that while learners were only moderately satisfied, teacher-counsellors and principals were very satisfied or expressed very strong satisfaction with education or information dissemination services of the Namibian School Counselling Programme.

In terms of academic development services, learners' mean response score is 3.26, teacher-counsellors' mean score is 2.91, and principals mean score is 3.18. By these results the teacher-counsellors seemed not to be satisfied while the learners and the principals were moderately satisfied with academic development services of the Namibian School Counselling Programme.

On Consultation services, learners' mean response score is 4.08, teacher-counsellors', 3.69, and principals' 3.98, indicating that while learners were very satisfied with the consultation services, the teacher-counsellors and the principals were only moderately satisfied. Referral services received mean satisfaction response scores of 3.14 (learners), 2.94 (teacher-counsellors) and 3.10 (principals). This means that while learners and principals were moderately satisfied with the referral services; teacher-counsellors, however, were dissatisfied with the referral services offered by the Namibian School Counselling Programme.

Qualitative data findings

The participants were asked to respond to the question on how they view the counselling services offered in schools. The participants reported that they were generally satisfied with the school counselling programme. They indicated that they were satisfied

with personal/social development as this service helped learners to better address their emotions and feelings. They mentioned that learners were able to express their emotions in a more appropriate and acceptable manner. Learners benefited as they were assisted to develop disciplined behaviours and maintain better, healthy interpersonal relationships and relate well to other learners of opposite sex. Participants further reported that after being counselled, learners change their behaviour and schools become better places for both teachers and learners. Most of the learners behaved well in class and acquired relevant skills examination techniques. Participants reported that learners were exposed to career information and they were well prepared to make sound informed decisions. They also reported that orientation of learners to various career options enabled learners to have information on different careers available in the labour market. Participants further reported that learners developed listening skills that help them concentrate in class and resulted in better performance. They also learned better approaches to examinations and tests. They were also satisfied that the curriculum is responsive to social evils prevailing in the Namibian society. The learners were performing well academically in schools. In addition, participants indicated that they wanted counselling to be implemented in all the schools in Namibia. They also indicated that they wanted to see more teacher-counsellors appointed in schools as well as more counselling centres in different constituencies to enhance more access to counselling. Participants, particularly parents, wanted to be more involved in the programme and educated on the value of school counselling programme.

Excerpts from individual interview and focus group interview transcriptions regarding participants' satisfaction with the Namibian school counselling programme are as follows:
'On my side, I am also satisfied in the role the school counselling programme is playing in fulfilling the country's educational objectives…' *[Learner 4]*

'I am satisfied in the fact that these services help learners to be career oriented' [TC 11]

'…   I am happy and thankful for it' [school counselling programme] [parent1] 'Misbehaving learners when counselled they changed and become better learners, so, I am happy that school counselling services effect change in learners' behaviours'[principal 3]

DISCUSSION

The previous sections presented the results of the study. This section presents the discussion of the results of the study. The study examined the education stakeholders' (beneficiaries') satisfaction with regards to the counselling services provided to them and their families. It emerged from this study that participants expressed satisfaction with many of the services of the Namibian School Counselling Programme including counselling, academic and career planning, information dissemination, and referral and consultation services. Consultation service was particularly very satisfactory to the learners and their parents, although teacher-counsellors and principals expressed only moderate satisfaction with the service. Furthermore, academic services were very satisfactory to learners, principals and parents, but teacher–counsellors expressed moderate satisfaction with the service. The importance of beneficiaries feeling satisfied with the services they receive cannot be over-emphasized as expression of satisfaction may be an indication that they are getting something of value from the programme. Studies by Hughley, Gysbers and Starr (1993) and Remley and Albright (1988) found that learners believe that school counselling programmes are capable of adding something of value to their school work. That learners see teacher-counsellors as people who know about the school curriculum and learning experiences they are exposed to in the school can assist them to relate these to career opportunities after leaving school.

Another aspect of the Namibian school counselling programme that evokes feeling of satisfaction with learners and parents is with regard to services of the programme directed to meeting their basic needs and fundamental rights. Many of the learners and their parents are devastated by HIV which has resulted in the deaths of parents, leaving many learners orphaned. Many Namibian children of school-going ages are under their grandparents' care and supervision; hence, the assistance and support they received in the form of nutrition from feeding schemes and social grants to parents all under the auspices of the school counselling programme cannot but be received with satisfaction.

Further analysis of data revealed that participants reported that counselling services enhanced learners' academic performance. However, the finding that counselling services enhances academic

performance seems to be in contrast to the finding of Chireshe's (2011) study conducted in Zimbabwe which aimed at assessing the school counsellors' and students' perceptions of the benefits of school guidance and counselling services in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Chireshe (2011) indicated that it might be difficult to correlate academic achievement to guidance and counselling services received. Participants further reported that counselling services enhanced personal and social development, helped them express their emotions in a mature manner, improved behaviour, reduced discipline at school, and fostered good interpersonal relations among learners. These findings are in line with findings by Gallant and Zhao (2011); Alemu (2013) and Remley and Albright (1988) who asserted that counselling services enrich personal and social development, advance interpersonal relations and increase self-awareness and understanding of learners. This view is further supported by Talimethi and Mbewa (2012) who argued that providing services well targeted to meet the socio-economic needs of school community members help build capacities and motivate towards improved quality of performance. The researchers gained insight that the data mirrored the humanistic principle that a sense of purpose is the primary influence on human behaviour. Thus, if learners are provided with necessary resources and conducive environment, they can easily direct themselves; hence they expressed satisfaction with the counselling services offered to them and their families.

Acknowledgement

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