

**EFFECTIVENESS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES ON
DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS ACADEMIC COMPETENCE. A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN
KENYA**

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Abstract

Students in institutions of higher learning encounter challenges in their dairy living which leaves many of them devastated, not able to make realistic academic choices and unable to cope with life. Guidance and counselling services are usually provided in public and private universities in Kenya. These services are meant to promote the students well being within a learning set up. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on development of students' academic competence in public and private universities in Kenya. The study employed *ex post facto* casual comparative design. Quantitative data was collected by use of a questionnaire that was administered to 369 third and fourth year full-time undergraduate students enrolled in three public and three private universities in Kenya. In addition, qualitative data was collected through an interview conducted among ten (10) student counsellors and a focus group discussion involving thirty six (36) peer counsellors from the universities studied. Purposive, proportionate and stratified random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. t-test was used to test the significance and determine whether to reject or accept the study hypotheses. All tests were based on the 0.05 level of significance. An analysis of the findings indicated significant differences in the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on development of students' academic competence between those enrolled in public and private universities. The findings showed that through effective guidance and counselling services, students in private universities had better growth in the academic competence than those enrolled in public universities. The analysis of

the findings also indicated no significant gender differences in effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on students' development of academic competence in both public and private universities. It was recommended that the university authorities should establish clear policies that would improve and strengthen guidance and counselling services to make them effective for the attainment of students' academic competence.

1. Introduction

University education is beneficial to the individual and the society as a whole. Through this type of education the individual is inspired not only to explore but also to be at ease with the world of knowledge and thus acquiring general competencies and habits of thoughts. For instance the individual acquires the capacity to test truths and evaluate assumptions such as superstitious beliefs, propaganda, indoctrination and brainwashing. It liberates people from retrogressive and harmful traditional beliefs and practices such as female genital mutilation, parochialism and negative ethnicity among others. Currently, in Kenya, one of the most critical interventions in the university education sector includes widening university enrollment with an emphasis on science and technology and the overall institutional capability.

As indicated in the Kenya Government Sessional Paper No. 1 (2005), the rapid expansion of universities (public and private) faces challenges such as mismatch between skills acquired by university graduates and the demands in the industry, admission and students' credit transfers. Thus although university education is expanding to cater for the increasing demand of the qualified applicants, there has been no corresponding growth in the country's economy to absorb the graduates. As noted by Ndondo (2004) students may become disenchanted when they have difficulty relating their education or training to the rest of their lives. In addition, students in the educational institutions search quite ardently for values that would give meaning to life after college or training. On the other hand, in spite of the massive expansion, gender and regional imbalances have shaped and continue to shape the development of higher education in Kenya as in other African countries (Ngombe, Mwiria, Wawira & Wesonga, 2003). The effective counselling services assists, particularly university undergraduate students individually or in groups to develop competencies that help them adjust to different situations and make appropriate decisions in life. As noted by Mutie and Ndambuki (2004), there is growing complexity in education, vocational and social structures in the country. Biswalo (1996) points out that for most students, the college years represent unique challenges. It is actually a time of significant personal growth and decision making regarding one's values, interpersonal relationships, career and other life goals all within a stressful student academic environment. The problems often encountered by the students include: academics, interpersonal relationships and sexuality, family problems, financial challenges, self-identify issues, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem and depression or anxiety (Sikolia & Lutomia, 2002). As highlighted in the Vice- chancellor's Report (2000), when students face problems, they may express their dissatisfaction in any of the following ways: withdrawal, drug abuse, demonstrations, riots or anxiety. Moreover, most students in the institutions of higher learning are adolescents or young adults. This is a trying period in relation to their physical, emotional and academic development Mangal (2007). At this age also, the adolescents may try all sorts of adjustment mechanisms to get

their needs fulfilled. Makinde (1984) points out that there is need for the institutions to guide the young people about making right choices of the educational tracks they have to follow in order to realize their goals. Therefore working with university students effectively requires specialized knowledge.

Acquisition of academic competence by learners enhances the goal to attainment of vision 2030 by Kenyan institutions for being able to provide globally competitive quality education and training to her citizens thus contributing to the development of individual well-being. According to the GOK (1999) large numbers of learners in education and training institutions were in dire need of guidance and counselling. Therefore there is need for Effective counseling services which should be based on a complete understanding and acceptance of students' experiences. The effective counselling services are not only crucial for those students' who deviate from the norms, but for all university students (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2004). Therefore, all students would require counselling services in order to develop their academic competence. Effective counselling will enable them to deal with psychological problems they may experience and make rational decisions on how to solve or cope with the academic challenges.

From the foregoing, it is also clear that a lot has been done to address gender disparities in educational institutions. However as noted by (GOK, 2007) the impact has not been strong as desired. There are still challenges to the attainment of gender equality in educational and acquisition of various competencies such as academic achievement.

2. Problem of the research

Guidance and counselling services have been put in place in public and private universities in Kenya. These services are meant to assist students to develop their academic competence in order to make realistic choices and relevant decisions in their educational field and life in general. However, there are noticeable students' disturbances that often take the form of: wastage of time, poor study habits, substance abuse, difficulty in coping with examination anxiety, dissatisfaction of study programmes/institutions and poor career choices. The universities authorities are therefore confronted with the students' academic adjustment challenges. Thus, this study sought to compare the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on development of students' academic competence in public and private universities in Kenya and also by students' gender.

Research focus

The development of academic competency by students enables them make realistic progress in their educational programme. The student is able to solve academic problems, performing task or moving towards set objectives. According to Mohanty (2003) academic competence enables the students to pursue the right type of education in which the required balance is met for accommodating the manpower needs of the economy. At the university level, students are assisted through academic counselling to choose appropriate courses and not to choose them for prestige purposes.

Academic guidance and counselling is therefore important for assisting students to meet their educational opportunities. This means educating them towards becoming cultivated individuals and at the same time preparing them for participation in life activities that will be socially useful

and personally satisfying. The academic guidance and counselling services offer opportunities to students to discover their own abilities (Biswalo, 1996). In addition, these services help students to make suitable educational and vocational plans thus preparing them to realize their capabilities and interests.

The study shows that both male and female students in public and private universities are capable of developing the academic competence. From the foregoing, it is clear that a lot has been done to address gender disparities in Educational institutions in Kenya. However as noted by (GOK, 2007) the impact has not been strong as desired. There are still challenges to the attainment of gender equality in educational and acquisition of various competencies such as academic competence.

3. Methodology of Research

3.1 General background of Research

The study applied casual-comparative research design. The variables of interest included counselling services as the independent variable and student academic competence as the dependent variable. This design allows comparison of groups. The design was therefore found appropriate for the study because it enabled the researcher to make comparisons between the public and private universities in the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services based on student development of academic competence and gender

3.2 Sample of research

A sample of 369 third and fourth year students participated in the study. The groups of students were preferred because of their longer period of stay in the universities compared to the first and second year students. Thus they would have a better understanding of the counselling services in their institutions. The selection of the students who participated in the study was done using stratified random sampling technique. The students were distributed among the universities using proportionate sampling. The other respondents in the study included ten university student counsellors who were purposefully selected. In addition, thirty six peer counsellors (six from each university) participated in the study. Thus, the total number of respondents was four hundred and fifteen.

3.3 Instruments and Procedures

The researcher used three instruments to solicit data from the respondents who included third and fourth year undergraduate students, universities students' counsellors and peer counsellors. The instruments were developed by examining the research objectives, hypotheses and related literature. The three data collection tools included a students' questionnaire, Peer counsellors' focus group discussion and the student counsellors' interview schedule. A pilot study was conducted before the main study whereby two (2) universities with similar characteristics to those under study but not included in the sample were selected. These included one (1) public and one (1) private. Twenty students (20) ten from each category were randomly selected. In addition, four peer counsellors, two (2) from each university and two (2) university counsellors, one (1) from

each university were involved in the exercise. The data collected from the pilot study was used to compute the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's coefficient alpha method was used to determine internal consistency of the items. In the study, the items were considered reliable if they yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above. This figure is usually considered desirable for consistency levels (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). In this study, the reliability coefficient of the items was 0.9656 for academic competence. The reliability test was for both public and private universities and was considered desirable for consistency levels.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed to find out whether there were significant differences in effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in development of student academic competence between public and private universities in Kenya. Comparisons were also done on effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on student development of academic competence in both public and private universities by gender. The t- test statistical technique was used for analysis. The t-test is appropriate in finding out whether significant differences exist between two groups in a study. The significance level was set at 0.05. Qualitative analysis was done by establishing patterns and trends from the information gathered.

4. Results of Research

The following are the finding of this research:

4.1 Effectiveness of Guidance and counselling services between public and private universities on development of students' academic competence

To determine whether there were significant differences in the effectiveness of counselling services between the two categories of universities mean scores were computed and t-test analysis done. Table 1 shows a summary of data analysis.

Table 1: Comparison of Development of Students' Academic Competence between Public and Private Universities.

	Type of University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Academic competence	public	282	29.3865	10.65587	-4.701	363	.000
	private	83	35.5542	9.97344			

The t-test results in Table 1 indicate that there was statistically significant difference between public and private universities in development of students' academic competence. An examination of the mean scores for the two types of universities revealed a mean score of 29.387 for the public universities and 35.554 for the private universities. This is an implication that guidance and counselling services provided in private universities enhances the development of students' academic competence to a greater extent compared to the public universities.

4.2 Gender Differences in Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling in Development of Students Academic Competence in Public Universities

Analysis was done to find out gender differences in development of students academic competence in public universities. The findings are shown in Tables 2.

Table 2: t-test Analysis for Development of Students' Academic Competence in Public Universities by Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Personal competencies	Male	173	29.0751	10.44031	-.979	272	.328
	Female	101	30.3663	10.69086			

The results in Table 2 indicate that some mean differences existed between males (29.075) and females (30.366) in development of the students' academic competence in public universities. This shows that the females have a stronger academic competence through counselling than the males in both public universities. However, the differences seem to be statistically insignificant. The t-test results indicate that the computed p-value was greater than the set alpha value. In view of these findings, there were no statistically significant gender differences in development of academic competence in public universities.

4.3 Gender Differences in Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Development of Students Academic Competence in Private Universities

Data analysis was done to find out gender differences in the development of students' academic competence in private universities. The findings are shown in Tables 3.

Table 3: t-test analysis for Development of Students Academic Competence in Private Universities by Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Personal competencies	Male	34	36.6765	8.40173	.853	81	.396
	Female	49	34.7755	10.94925			

The results in Table 3 indicate that some mean differences existed between male (36.677) and female (34.776) in the development of the academic competence in private universities. This shows that the males have a stronger academic competence through guidance and counselling than the females in private universities. However, the differences seem to be statistically insignificant. In view of these findings, there were no statistically significant gender differences in development of students' academic competence in private universities

5. Discussion

The results of the study showed that there was statistically significant difference between public and private universities in development of students' academic competence through counselling services. Mohanty (2003) points out that for the academic guidance and counselling

services to be effective, opportunities need to be provided to the students so that they discover their own abilities and interests. Therefore students would develop the academic competence when the educational institutions have properly established structures that provide preventive, remedial and developmental academic guidance so that the students can make realistic educational plans for their future. Perhaps this academic environment may be the reason for the increased students' enrollments and rapid growth of private universities in the country despite the introduction of self-sponsored degree programmes in the public universities (CHE, 2010). Effective academic counselling provides students with opportunities to discover their own abilities and interests. The counsellor provides information to students on different courses of study, study places, duration and requirements for these courses, examination techniques and career prospects

From the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative data collected from both public and private universities, it can be concluded that both male and female students are capable of developing the academic competence. The results indicate that there was no significant difference in effectiveness of guidance and counselling services on development of students' academic competence by gender. The female students are more likely to seek counselling services in order to deal with these issues. Counselling which is a series of direct contact with another individual will offer assistance to students in changing attitudes, behaviour and decision making. On the other hand the male students may be understood to be assertive and independent while women are associated with social anxiety.

6. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, significant differences were reported on development of the students' academic competence between public and private universities. The students in private universities seemed to have higher positive growth of their competence through assistance of guidance and counselling services compared to those enrolled in public universities. It can, therefore, be concluded that the difference in student behaviour witnessed in the two types of universities was due to the state of students' development of their academic competence.

The results of the study indicated that there was no significant gender difference in development of students academic competence through provision of counselling services in both public and private universities. It has been suggested in the literature review that both sexes are similar in competitive level. Both seem to need a stimulus to compete and achieve, however when males are aroused they sustain a higher level of competition than the females. gender equity is emphasized in educational institutions and there is an engendering of the curriculum. There is also the emphasis to improve gender participation in various academic fields and eliminate sexual harassment and gender based violence. There is also the creation of gender responsive learning environment through improvement of boarding facilities, water and sanitation.

7. Recommendations

It was also found that guidance and counselling services in private universities contributed to better growth of the students' academic competence. Therefore the university managers need to strengthen these services for holistic development of the students. The Commission for Higher

Education and the managers of public and private universities need to organize workshops and conferences in order to exchange ideas on how to strengthen students' guidance and counselling services in the universities. University management should also provide adequate physical and human resources that are crucial in promoting the provision of guidance and counselling services.

Guidance and counselling services in both public and private universities need to be strengthened through employment of adequate numbers of professionally well-trained male and female counselors. This would cater for any gender preferences by the clients who receive the counselling services. Counselling also assist in opening academic opportunities to university students` in spite of their gender.

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