

## Assessment of Guidance and Counselling Service Centre in Higher Education Institutions: A Qualitative Research

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Guidance and counseling services in all higher education institutions cannot be overstated due to increasingly complexities of modern life that have placed heavy demands and responsibilities on students. This study tried to assess how Counseling Service Center of higher education institutions (HEI) can better serve students to be successful academically, socially and psychologically.

**Methods:** Explorative qualitative research was conducted in higher education institutions students. Accordingly, 12 club representatives and secretaries were selected from four campuses purposively. Totally 48 participants for focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted with each two club representatives such as academic, gender, welfare, peace, students council and discipline clubs. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively on thematic basis.

**Results:** The most commonly observed problems in the campus were: academic (study skill, time management and career counseling need), psychological (stress, anxiety, depression drug addiction, sexual related problems, suicide, and loneliness (homesickness)) and interpersonal relationship (lack of conflict management skill, violence handling, discrimination, assertiveness, communication) problems.

**Conclusion:** Students academic, psychological and interpersonal relationship problems can bring about academic failure among higher education institutions students. The respondents suggested that academic and psychological problems needs more attention to intervene for students' academic success

**Keywords:** Assessment; Counselling service; Higher education

### INTRODUCTION

The rationale to offer guidance and counselling services in higher educational settings for students is clear. The academic years is a periods of academic, social, personal, emotional and intellectual growth for most adolescents. By resolving physical, emotional, social and academic difficulties of the students and by helping students understand their learning strengths and weaknesses; their academic achievement can be improved and their overall development can be enhanced. On top of this, Abera [1] the increasing complexities in the society, industrial and technological development, changes of the educational system and increasing number of students necessitated the provision of effective guidance and counselling service more than any other time. Thus, supporting adolescents in all aspects of their development is very critical to their success.

As a fact, the goal or expected outcome of all guidance and counselling services to enhance the development of competencies, coping skills and climax at behaviour change for a better and successful life. Similarly, Alemu [2] contend that guidance and counselling plays a major role of promoting students' success through a focus on social and emotional adjustment by means of prevention and intervention services, advocacy and treatment of emotional turbulence. In addition, guidance and counselling services provide students with the opportunity to learn more about themselves and others before they have problems resulting from fear, anger and mood swing. Boutwell and Myrisk [3] articulate that most students express a basic need of social and emotional adjustment which is grounded on foundations of comprehensive guidance and counselling services. These services integrate competence

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promotion and foster students' social and emotional development framework for reduction of risk and detrimental behaviours such as substance use, promiscuous sex, violence, depression and attempted suicide that deter success in life. Allen [4] depicts guidance and counselling as an ultimate icon that addresses students' behavioural content, taking into account context, global issues, local priorities, building moral capacities based on rational decision-making, social tolerance, environmental, adaptable student force and quality of life. Abera [1] claims that the students face with numerous personal, academic, social and emotional needs and problems in which if unattended could lead to host patterns of undesirable behaviours. Virtually, all countries have established channels to intensify and improve guidance and counselling services in their respective learning institutions in attempt to address tenets of students' behaviours. The history of guidance and counselling around the world varies greatly based on how different countries and local communities have chosen to provide personal, academic, and social competencies among the college students

In the university teaching learning milieu, guidance counselling is a multidimensional form which encompasses personal, academic and occupational perspectives. Hence the need to offer diverse guidance counselling service is foreseeable. According to Seyoum [5] in higher educational institutions atmosphere, the guidance and counselling practices is an efficient and effective way of supporting and helping students deal with problems and issues in educational, career and personal/social areas. Substantiating Day's conception, he insisted that an essential aspect of the guidance counselling service is assisting students in knowing the personal strengths and weaknesses, providing information on one's option, helping the student in the analysis of this information and aiding them in the college admission counselling process.

According to UNESCO [6], educational and vocational guidance and counselling are mostly offered on an individual basis to students specializing in education as well as other. A very number of little students receive some psychological care. There has been a guidance centre attached to the office of the dean of students, but it did not last for lack of personnel. Some neurotic students are referred to a hospital where a neurologist with some training in psychology available. There are some members of staff in the faculty of education who are specialists in guidance and counselling but they are engaged in teaching and may help students on individual voluntary basis in their personal problem.

## METHODS

### The research design

**The Qualitative survey:** Qualitative tools FGD were employed, main research instrument especially to identify the profile and felt needs of students. Accordingly, to assess the counseling needs of students, the researcher prepared counseling needs assessment. Therefore, in the process of using this instrument, purposive sampling was drawn from students to generalize the findings of the study.

**Focus Group Discussion for Students (FGD):** Higher education institutions club representative students were selected. Results was conducted with each two club representatives such as academic, gender, welfare, peace, students council and discipline clubs the discussion was made with twelve (12) students of higher education institutions.

Thus, after the students were identified they were notified as to the purpose of the study and get invited for the FGD. A focus group discussion guide was developed to gather qualitative data from students.

**Data collection procedures:** In conducting the focus group discussion, first participants were selected using purposive sampling methods and date, time and venue of the FGD were announced. During the focus group discussions, notes were taken and discussions were taped by the research assistant. The researcher chaired all discussion and facilitated the discussions.

**Data analysis:** Qualitative methods were used in analyzing information collected using different instruments. Qualitative data obtained using FGD were analyzed qualitatively. A content analysis of transcripts of qualitative information FGD result was done to generate concepts, key themes and patterns. Triangulation of the different sources of information was made as deemed necessary.

## RESULTS

To assess the overall condition of counselling services of higher education institutions, FGD qualitative data were used.

The focus group discussion was conducted with each two club leaders /representatives of academic club, gender club, welfare club, and discipline club. The participants of the focus group discussion were eight students' higher education institutions.

Based on the analysis of the study done, the following result were obtained; response of the focus group discussants towards the service of higher education institutions counselling centre indicated that dean of the students, counsellors, and student representatives, did not attempt to advertise the counselling service to the needy students.

Similarly, another respondent reported that no orientation was given to the freshman students. This indicates that the university administrators did not understand the value of counselling service for the students. Many of the students are suffering from various psychological, social, self-adjustment, time management, study techniques, and interpersonal relationship problems. However, they are unaware of the presence and function of the counselling service of higher education institutions Students.

Besides, the focus group discussion participants forwarded that the counselling centre should deal with the following problems commonly observed in the campus. The counselling service centre of higher education institutions should attempt to solve the following main problems.

a) Academic problem related to study skill, time management, doing research and projects, career counselling need and academic failure

b) Interpersonal relationship problems such as, lack of conflict management skill, violence handling problem, discrimination, assertiveness, communication problems, and social phobia are the major identified problems by the participants.

c) Psychological problems, specifically stress, anxiety, drug addiction, sexual related problems, suicide, loneliness (homesickness) and depression.

Concerning the function of the counselling service centre of higher education institutions in addressing the needs of the students, the group members have raised the following ideas. The counselling centre is not successful at achieving the professional goals and expected functions of the centre. However, the service of counselling is limited in the higher educational institutions. Furthermore, the number of the counsellors is not proportional with the number of students across the campuses of the higher educational institutions requiring professional counselling services. Moreover, the need of the students is highly increasing beyond the capacity and number of the counsellor.

The university did not provide the necessary facilities such as financial support, skilled personnel, and equipment/materials such as stationeries, printers, and tables for the counselling centres. The clients are unaware of the relevance of the counselling service centre. No encouragement has been made for the counselling centre from the university authorities'. The lack of separated special office and the willingness and courage of the counsellors has been an obstacle to effective counselling service. Even though the students are facing various problems, the students are afraid to consult counsellors and their instructors freely.

The focus group participants have pointed out things to be done to enhance the counselling centre of higher education institutions Students. The following major recommended solutions should be taken into account in order to establish and strengthen standardized counselling centre in accordance with some professional psychological organization.

Some respondents articulate appropriate strategies on study skills, time management, anxiety management, drug addiction relief, substance abuse prevention, HIV/AIDS counselling, effective communication skill, interpersonal skill, conflict management and related skills could greatly help the students. In addition, the counselling centre and the administrators should work strongly towards awareness creation by preparing pamphlets, brochures, and other related mechanisms.

Professional development trainings on various issues should be arranged for the students in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations. The university should arrange different trainings such as, life skill training, psycho-education, career counselling, and job seeking strategies. In addition, the participants stressed that employing highly qualified professionals (well equipped with counselling skills and practices) could enhance greatly the services provided by the counselling office.

The observation of the researcher, in addition to the comments of the participants, revealed that the current persons who are

acting as counsellors lack professional qualification and experience. They are not graduates of counselling psychology. The other recommendation of the participants is that special budget should be assigned from the ministry of education for the counselling service centres at different universities. This can be utilized to purchase office equipment (including rooms, stationeries, tables, computers, and printers). Furthermore, they forwarded internet service should be available, to help the counsellors to develop their counselling skills and for more updated information on different psychological problems, for example, books, journals, articles, cases, etc. can be greatly helpful to strengthen the service of higher education institutions Students counselling centre.

According to the focus group discussion members, students' diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, and types of students' disability can be a great input in the process of counselling service. In addition, they suggested that the level of students' academic performance should be considered for restructuring the counselling centre. To achieve this, they advocated that different counsellors with varying specialization or interest could address the needs of students with different level of academic achievement.

The counselling office or room should be on the ground and be easily accessible for all persons (students) with various forms of physical disabilities (e.g. orthopaedic) major psychological problems, and specific minor needs of students (e.g. career counselling, academic counselling, individual, and group counselling). Besides, assistant personnel for professional counsellor should be employed. According to the participant students, secretaries and other office assistants could be useful. Moreover, the focus group discussion participants recommended the establishment of recreational centres around the counselling room.

The counselling centre should be pleasurable to the eyes of the clients. Planting different kinds of flowers and the colour of the counselling room should not be annoying to the clients. For example, researchers have found that colour is closely associated with heightened blood pressure and heart beat. The student-counsellor should be proportional. The centre needs a collaboration different mental health professional such as psychiatrists, social workers, counselling and clinical psychologists

The participants of the focus group discussion pointed out that low academic achievement, stress, lack of information for the students on their future career, communication problem during presentation (social phobia, inability to express their needs and opinions). Where the indicator of counselling needs at higher education institutions Students. Concerning adjustment problem, they are fresh to the campus environment and therefore they are not well adjusted to the campus environment. Furthermore in effective study habit and alienation from the mainstream society and lack of connection to the dominant are reported by participants.

Consequently, other descendant stated frequent mental health related problems such as (headache, sleep disturbance, poor appetite of food), department selection and career placement,

conflict on norms, values, and beliefs due to contact with students of various cultural backgrounds were reported. Again with lack of social skills (poor interpersonal relationships, communications, with their fellow students and their instructors, financial problems, drug addiction problems are the potential problem that the importance of restructuring the counselling centre at higher education institutions.

## DISCUSSION

A discussion with the representative from different clubs in the higher education institutions indicated that the counselling centre of higher education institutions did not provide the appropriate services to the students. Most of the students had even no information about the existence of the centre to get services, its function of counselling service provided, and its location in the higher educational institutions.

In support of this, a research conducted by Seyoum [5] academic atmosphere in the higher educational institutions in the guidance and counselling practice is an efficient and effective way of supporting and helping students deal with problems and issues in educational, career and personal/social area.

Other study Alutu [7] also identified that, many of the students were suffering from various psychological, social, time management, academic related and interpersonal difficulties due to absence of appropriate counselling services. This result is consistent with previous findings that an essential aspect of guidance-counselling service is assisting students knowing the personal strengths and weaknesses, providing information on one option, helping the students in the analysis of this information and aiding them in the college admission counselling process.

A result, stated in Fernando [8], a greater number of counsellors in educational institutions due to the fact that the one's available cannot adequately manage the large caseloads assigned to them. The result of this study also realized that the currently working psychologist /counsellor were not proportional with the number of students' required professional counselling services. In some cases certain resources, such as office equipment, internet services, updated written reference and phone cell, were unavailable both for students and for counsellors.

The study identified some recommendations like students diversity level of students' academic performance, trained and equivalent professionals, accessibility of the office, types of the service available, types psychological disorders and assistant personnel could be taken into account in the process of shaping and restructuring the counselling centres.

The analysis also showed, lack of career information, low academic achievement, lack of social skills, adjustment problem, frequent of mental health related problem and alienation from the mainstream society were some of potential problem that indicate, the importance of counselling services. This finding is also consistent with Onyinyeowuamanam [9] that showed how the school counsellor and other school personnel (the principal, teachers, school health personnel, and administrative staff), could cooperate to provide quality education and reduce of solve educational, vocational, and socio-personal problems, such as

physical health problems, which could lead to emotional disturbance and stress. It further proposed that the cooperation of the school and others could help to reduce poor academic performance, examination malpractice, high rate of dropout, deviant behaviour, and wrong choices of courses and career placements among students

In the spirit of developing a higher education system together, the Higher Education Relevance Quality Assurance (HERQA) believes that an institutional audit of the various academic sectors, including the guidance counselling will prove helpful to higher education institutions, the MOE, higher educational institutions communities, students parent's, and employers. This is one contribution to the combined effort to maintain and enhance the quality of higher education.

Reynold and Cheek [10] substantiate the plan for the plan for effective counselling centre service includes all guidance and counselling activities, classrooms sessions with students, individual counselling, and meeting with administrative, parents, support agencies and orientations.

Yilfashewa [5] finding also concretizes clearly about the policy guidelines help school counsellors, teachers and students to know what to expect from the services. In an attempt to establish, promote and evaluate guidance counselling program, a given academic institution must have a guidance plans that encompasses various program deemed necessary and appropriate for a particular system.

Although ,the respondents of the study mentioned few international and national inputs ,the currently available organizational functional inputs listed in interview part of this study indicates its importance in restructuring the counselling centre of higher education institutions.

The analysis also showed concerning the establishment and current process of higher education institutions counselling centre, organs of the university engaged in limited activities performed. Seleshi [11] strengthens efficient guidance counselling services was the outcome of collective efforts. Furthermore, Abera and Tekle [12] pointed out that that counselling centre should not be near the administrative building because the consumers of the service will associate the counsellor with administration.

The analyses of this finding contradicted with the. Lehr and Sumararh [13] stated that an effective counselling service have adequate resources, equipment, and space. In Botswana, UNESCO [6] also supports an effective school guidance counselling services have counseling room and resource rooms which are private and accessible.

The counselling centre of higher education institutions did not meet the existing international standards in relation to maintaining the working environment. In contrary, Sokol [14] indicated that the effective school guidance service the following materials: computer for computer-assisted career guidance programs ,career choices explanation material, self-development resources ,college catalogues, test taking skills packages, booklets that helps students address developmental needs such as adjusting to their physical changes ,handling peer pressure and

preventing substance abuse ,newsletter ,brochures and pamphlets .

The higher education institutions counselling centre was found that it had no intra-/inter-organizational network, administrative independence and autonomy to establish the necessary collaboration with other organization.

There are no clear policy and legislation documents at higher education institutions, which grant authority of counselling centre to establish inter/intra-organizational networks. The report also shows no monitoring and evaluation mechanisms designed to evaluate the services.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion based on qualitative findings of this study indicates lack of information about the types of services offered the need to have more professional counsellors in higher education institutions campuses and colleges the greater number of intervention models, and little attention was given by the management bodies to the guidance counselling centre.

In addition, the study participants reported that students were suffering from various psychological, social, financial, and educational problems. As a result the need for collaborative work with administrative personnel, teachers, students, families and other relevant bodies to provide guidance counselling centre were strongly suggested and / or supported by interviewee, group discussants and limited reviewed documents.

With regard to counselling services roles and functions almost all the study participants realized the role of counselling in handling the students' problems, preventing the overall academic difficulties, in supporting and enhancing health growth. Additionally, the participants reported individual and group guidance counselling, drugs, and alcohol prevention, HIV/AIDS, consultation interventions, training programs and other relevant activities, would be in designing program functions of counselling centre of higher education institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations for research and practice were based on the finding and conclusions of this study. Therefore,

- The universities have to provide a professional guidance and counselling services for its students in cooperation with psychology department for the effective stay of students in their personal, social and academic progresses.
- Based on the finding, awareness raising and attitudinal change towards the guidance and counselling services offered, the universities management bodies should need to appoint dedicated and capable counsellors and counselling centres in sufficiently and provide capacity building training for the colleges for close and appropriate counselling services.
- Ethiopian Higher educational institutions should work with policy makers to enforce laws that influence the abandon and the distribution of khat, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs proactively which in turn affect students' personal, social and academic effectiveness and community at large.

- Higher education institutions counselling should have relevant stakeholders within the higher educational institutional structures and mode of communication with students clinic ,clubs in the colleges ,campus, departments police, student affairs ,students food services, administrators and others for the proper guidance and close relations with service providers and students.

- As the finding shows the higher education institutions should work with the colleges and departments for the students to get appropriate services about their personal, social and academic issues in close follow up and timely services which in turn contribute for the professional and organizational effectiveness of the universities and produce competent and skilful students for the country at large .

- Though guidance and counselling are effective in assisting students in personal, social and academic, the counselling centres are weak and needs capacity building. Consequently, higher education institutions should regularly work in coordination with the colleges and departments to achieve the institutional, students' and national objectives in producing competent and productive skilled force for world of work.

- The higher educational institutions should embrace and value individual diversity and backgrounds of students through creating environment for the trust based relationships among students and the institution that affirm attitudes of helping one other and facilitate greater mutual trust and cooperation for the academic, personal and institutional proactive act to fit to the dynamic events of life in higher educational institutions and outside the world of work .

- In Ethiopian, higher educational institutions needs a multicultural sensitivity for students to be effective, in their academics, they need to aware the intercultural competency as a must be implemented in multiple approach to achieve the intentions of higher educational institutions goals in the country.

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