

Assessment of the Challenges and Professionalism of Teacher-Counsellors in Public Secondary Schools in Nandi County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Nandi County face the crucial and challenging task of effectively managing their dual roles as educators and mental health care providers for learners. This study examined the difficulties these professionals face and assessed the degree of professionalism demonstrated in their contacts with the student population. The research design employed in this study was an ex-post facto design, which involved a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The research gathered insights from a sample consisting of 198 instructors and 18 high school principals. The primary results indicated significant difficulties encountered by teacher-counsellors, including excessive workloads, limited resources (particularly confidential locations for counselling), and the complexities associated with maintaining professionalism and confidentiality. However, it is evident that teacher-counsellors consistently demonstrate a commendable level of professional behavior. School principals emphasised the importance of offering educators chances for ongoing professional development. The study found that teacher-counsellors in the area are devout professionals dealing with challenging situations. They are commonly trusted sources of assistance by students. However, noticeable deficiencies in resources and training impede their ability to fulfil their duty to the fullest extent. School administrators recognise the need for counselling services and advocate for increased funding, despite financial constraints. The research also provides insight into an enduring social stigma linked to asking for assistance, mainly observed within specific demographics of students. This study focuses on the distinct challenges and professional expectations teachers-counsellors face in Kenya. By shedding light on these issues, the research aims to inform policy decisions and training programs to provide better support for these crucial educators. Ultimately, the goal is to improve students' mental and emotional stability.

Keywords: Teacher-Counsellors, Professionalism, guidance and counselling

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I. Introduction

The scrutiny around teacher-counsellors' function in educational institutions has witnessed a notable escalation in recent years. Teacher-counsellors assume a pivotal function in the scholastic and interpersonal advancement of children, furnishing essential emotional and intellectual assistance that is imperative for the overall welfare of students (Lambie et al., 2019). Nevertheless, on a global scale, teacher-counsellors are encountering substantial obstacles that have the potential to influence their efficacy and professionalism.

One of the prevalent difficulties teacher-counsellors encounter is effectively maintaining their welfare in the face of elevated student misbehaviour. This circumstance impacts teacher-student relationship dynamics (Aldrup et al., 2018). This difficulty is not limited to any particular country. The study conducted by Aldrup et al. in a Western environment aligns with the experiences shared by educators throughout many global regions. In the context of Indonesia, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented distinctive obstacles for educators, hence exacerbating the pressures and occupational requirements faced by teachers who concurrently assume the role of counsellors (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Almanthari et al., 2020).

One salient concern pertains to the professional development and competency of teacher-counsellors. Kunter et al. (2013) conducted a study that emphasised the correlation between the professional competence of teachers and the quality of instruction and student development. The findings suggested that teachers with higher proficiency levels in their counselling responsibilities are more likely to be effective. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that teacher-counsellors may lack sufficient training and professional growth opportunities in

different nations, hindering their ability to fulfil their dual responsibilities effectively (Lauterbach et al., 2018). Additionally, it is common for schools to have a high ratio of students to counsellors, resulting in teacher-counsellors having excessive caseloads (National Association for College Admission Counseling & American School Counselor Association, 2017).

Prior studies have examined several facets of the educational setting that may have relevance to the present investigation. Aldrup et al. (2018) conducted a study to examine the potential mediating role of the teacher-student connection in the association between student misbehaviour and teacher welfare. This aspect holds significant importance considering the multifaceted responsibilities of teacher-counsellors, who must effectively manage both the pedagogical and emotional aspects of their interactions with students.

Teacher-counsellors' significance in public secondary schools within the East Africa region is essential, as they play a crucial role in fostering students' psychological, emotional, and social welfare (Ndhlovu, 2015). Several research studies undertaken in countries within the specified region, such as Kenya, have highlighted the substantial burden placed on teacher-counsellors and their teaching responsibilities. These individuals often lack enough training or support, as evidenced by the works of Momanyi (2015) and Mwangi&Otanga (2015). The professionals in question have additional obstacles due to the East Africa region's distinctive socio-cultural and economic setting. In certain nations, such as Kenya and Tanzania, teacher-counsellors frequently encounter elevated student-to-counsellor ratios, substantially restricting their capacity to offer personalised assistance (National Association for College Admission Counseling & American School Counselor Association, 2017). In addition, counsellors in the region must possess cultural competence and sensitivity towards the diverse array of cultures and languages present. It is essential to navigate and respect the varied community norms and practices (Lyanda, Jepchirchir&Ong'unya, 2012).

Recent research has identified distinct patterns in the difficulties encountered by teacher-counsellors operating in the East African region. Excessive workloads are a persistent concern, often resulting in elevated stress levels and burnout among individuals (Dakasku& Musa, 2020). Moreover, the absence of comprehensive training programs for teacher-counsellors is a noteworthy issue, resulting in numerous practitioners lacking the necessary skills to adequately address intricate student matters (Kolbert et al., 2017; Lauterbach et al., 2018). The COVID-19 epidemic presented significant problems to school institutions worldwide, including those in the East African region. During this particular time frame, educators who also serve as counsellors in public secondary schools encountered unfamiliar circumstances as they endeavoured to offer psychological and emotional assistance to students adapting to remote education and managing the broader societal consequences of the pandemic (Abdullah, 2020; Brown et al., 2020).

Although the East African region exhibits certain similarities, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of significant variations in the issues encountered by teacher-counsellors across different countries. In Kenya, the perception of Guidance and Counselling services in schools varies among teachers and students, influencing the overall effectiveness of these services (Momanyi, 2015). On the other hand, Tanzania faces a notable challenge with teacher-counsellors, which pertains to the absence of a uniform curriculum for guidance and counselling. Consequently, this situation has resulted in diverse approaches for different educational institutions (Ndhlovu, 2015). Assessing the professionalism and issues teacher-counsellors face is crucial, considering their significant impact on student welfare and the challenges they confront within the East African environment.

This assessment has the potential to provide valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing the efficacy of teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Nandi County. Doing so can contribute to advancing mental and emotional welfare among students within this specific region and in other similar contexts.

Purpose of the study

The primary objective of this research article was to examine the many obstacles encountered by teacher-counsellors inside public secondary schools in Nandi County. Additionally, this study aimed to evaluate the extent to which these professionals demonstrate professionalism.

Significance of the study

The study is vital in providing insights into teacher-counsellors' difficulties in public secondary schools in Nandi County. The research sought to evaluate the degree of professionalism exhibited by these educators to provide insights for policy suggestions about enhanced support systems and training initiatives for teacher-counsellors. The study has the potential to ultimately facilitate the improvement of students' mental health and welfare, cultivate a more favourable learning environment, and enhance the overall educational standards in the region.

Scope of the Study

The objective of the current study was to assess teacher-counsellors' challenges and professionalism in the context of public secondary schools in Nandi County. The focus of this study was to gain a comprehensive awareness of the issues encountered by teacher-counsellors in their professional capacities within this location. The factors mentioned above addressed in this study are workload, emotional stress, availability of resources, and level of institutional support. Simultaneously, the research evaluated the degree of professionalism demonstrated by these teacher-counsellors, encompassing an analysis of their educational background, adherence to ethical guidelines, participation in ongoing professional growth, and contributions to fostering mental health and overall welfare among students. The evaluation exclusively examined public secondary schools in Nandi County over a certain timeframe, offering a contemporary and geographically specific outlook.

Limitations of the Study

A constraint of this research is its geographical scope, which was limited to public secondary schools in Nandi County. Consequently, the applicability of the findings to other counties or national contexts may be restricted. Evaluating difficulties encountered by teacher-counsellors revealed a possible self-reporting bias. Concerning the evaluation of professionalism, the research relied on discernible markers and self-reported information, which may not have comprehensively encompassed the intricacies of professional conduct and could be a result of the need to present oneself in a socially desirable manner. Furthermore, the research failed to consider extraneous variables, such as community and familial assistance, which could have indirectly influenced teacher-counsellors' difficulties and their level of professionalism. Consequently, this study offers a restricted perspective on the larger context in which these individuals functioned.

Statement of Problem

The critical role of teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools was examined, particularly concerning students' personal and academic development during the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, the pandemic has forced a significant shift in the educational landscape towards online learning and has heightened stress among students, teachers, and families (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Abdullah, 2020). Particularly in Kenya, specifically in Nandi County, where challenges may have resulted from a lack of financing, inadequate teacher-counsellor preparation, and high student-to-counsellor ratios, this change was felt. (Mwangi&Otanga, 2015).

The general problem this research addressed was that teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Nandi County were encountering significant challenges that could potentially undermine their professionalism and effectiveness. These challenges included a lack of proper training, overwhelming caseloads, limited time due to dual teaching and counselling roles, and a clear policy framework guiding their work (Momanyi, 2015; Lambie et al., 2019). These issues may have impeded teacher-counsellors' abilities to adequately address students' mental health, academic performance, and overall welfare (Humphrey & Wigelsworth, 2016).

The specific issue addressed in this study was the lack of a comprehensive assessment of the challenges and professionalism of teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. This absence of assessment could have led to persistent problems in the quality of counselling services provided to students, with potential implications for students' mental health, academic achievement, and long-term life outcomes (Lauterbach et al., 2018).

This problem is of significant importance to Kenya as a whole, as the health and welfare of students are central to the country's future. Teacher-counsellors' effectiveness is integral to nurturing academically sound and mentally resilient students, qualities necessary for advancing a developing nation like Kenya (Karue&Amukowa, 2013).

This study aimed to fill a significant gap in understanding teacher-counsellors' challenges and implications of professional changes in Nandi County, Nandi County, Kenya. The research findings have highlighted these challenges and propose actionable solutions to enhance the professionalism and effectiveness of these key education stakeholders.

Theoretical framework

This study utilised the Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, as a framework to thoroughly analyse the intricate dynamics between teacher-counsellors and their respective surroundings. This study comprehensively examined the influence of interactions within and between different systems on the professionalism and challenges experienced by teacher-counsellors in Kenya. These systems encompassed the immediate work environment and broader societal and policy contexts, drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner (1977) and Bronfenbrenner & Ceci (1994).

The Ecological Systems Theory was relevant to this study because it facilitates a comprehensive examination of the diverse elements influencing teacher-counsellors in Nandi County. The study facilitated an exploration of the influence of various ecological systems on the roles and efficacy of teacher-counsellors. Specifically, it examined the impact of the microsystem, which encompasses the school environment, the mesosystem, which encompasses the interactions between home and school, the exosystem, which encompasses local government policies; the macro system, which encompasses national cultural and policy contexts in Kenya, and the chronosystem, which encompasses temporal changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors collectively shaped the experiences and effectiveness of teacher-counsellors, as highlighted in the works of Paat (2013) and Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000).

The research questions in this study were prepared with the Ecological Systems Theory in mind to evaluate the multiple levels of impact on teacher-counsellors' challenges and their capacity to uphold professional standards. One of the primary research questions posed: "To what extent do national educational policies, specifically within the macro system, influence the professional duties and obligations of teacher-counsellors operating within Nandi County?"

The study utilised a theoretical framework that guided the adoption a multi-level data collection approach. This approach encompassed interviews conducted with teacher-counsellors, surveys administered to students and parents, policy analysis, and community assessments. By employing these various methods, the study aimed to achieve a comprehensive and contextualised understanding of the challenges experienced by teacher-counsellors (Paat, 2013).

The utilisation of this theory played a crucial role in facilitating a comprehensive and multifaceted comprehension of the findings during the data interpretation process. In the case of the study's identification of elevated stress levels among teacher-counsellors, the researchers employed the Ecological Systems Theory as a guiding framework to investigate a range of systemic elements that contribute to this stress rather than exclusively ascribing it to individual causes. The study above emphasised the interrelatedness between the personal experiences of teacher-counsellors and the more significant educational, social, and policy landscapes. This approach facilitated the formulation of well-informed and comprehensive suggestions for improvement (Hayes, O'Toole, & Halpenny, 2017).

The Ecological Systems Theory served as an excellent theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framework had a crucial role in informing the research design, providing guidance for the data collection and analytic procedures, and enhancing the interpretation of the findings. It emphasised the complex and interwoven nature of the surroundings where Nandi County teacher-counsellors work.

II. Material and Methods

The study utilised an ex-post facto research design. This design, rooted in descriptive research methodology, is invaluable when the researchers cannot manipulate the independent variable (Bevins, 1999). By opting for an ex-post facto design, the researchers could retrospectively observe and analyse the natural conditions surrounding teacher-counsellors without introducing any changes or manipulations into the study settings. In essence, the design allowed the researchers to understand the already transpired phenomena related to the professionalism and challenges of teacher-counsellors, even when they did not have control over the variables under study. This choice of research design is fitting when the goal is to explore possible relationships between variables without the capacity to manipulate the independent variable (Isaac & Michael, 1971).

Research instruments

The primary method employed for collecting self-report data from teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools within Nandi County, Kenya, was the utilisation of questionnaires. The surveys were administered to 198 teachers to tailor them to suit the specific context in which these professionals work. The tools utilised in this study included a variety of questions designed expressly to gauge participants' opinions on the counselling programmes' effectiveness, their attitudes toward the programme, and their assessments of the counsellors' professionalism, as proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2017).

In order to enhance the quantitative data, interviews were utilised as a qualitative research instrument, providing nuanced perspectives on the experiences and viewpoints of essential individuals involved in the educational context. The present study involved carefully designing and administering interview schedules for a sample of 18 school principals. The conducted interviews played a crucial role in uncovering valuable insights into the execution of the counselling program, the difficulties faced by the staff members, particularly the teacher-counsellors, and the areas that require improvement. Interviews conducted with principals are of great significance due to their ability to provide insights into the administrative viewpoint of the effectiveness of counselling programs and the inherent challenges that arise from the combined responsibilities of teacher-counsellors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Furthermore, document analysis was a qualitative research methodology involving the interpretation of diverse documents to extract essential insights relevant to the counselling program. This study employed a comprehensive approach, thoroughly examining several sources, such as transcripts from counselling sessions, program manuals and curricula, and referral documents. The methodology outlined by Bowen (2009) offers researchers a comprehensive comprehension of the structure, execution, and broader influence of the counselling programme on students within the complex and diverse setting of public secondary schools in Nandi County, Kenya.

Sampling procedures and sample size

The study's population included 80 secondary schools situated within Nandi County. In order to account for the potential diversity among the schools, the study utilised a stratified sampling with the classification of schools as National, Extra county, or County schools; their makeup in terms of gender (Boys, Girls, or Mixed schools); and the nature of the school, whether Boarding, Day or a combination of both (Lavrakas, 2008). This stratification guarantees that the sample represents the diverse range of schools within the County, thereby offering a complete understanding of the many contexts in which secondary schools in Nandi function.

A total of 18 schools were randomly selected to participate in the study from the stratified groups. The selection method presumably employed a random number generator or a lottery system to ensure a fair and unbiased selection of schools from each stratum. Implementing a randomised selection procedure is crucial to mitigate bias and enhance the probability of achieving a representative sample of schools that appropriately reflects the broader population of schools within the County (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006).

Among the 18 schools chosen for analysis, a sample of 198 teachers was selected randomly from the population of teachers for this study. This particular sample was probably obtained by utilising a basic random sampling approach, assuring every teacher had an equitable chance of inclusion. As an illustration, it is conceivable that a distinct identifier is allocated to each teacher, and a random number generator could have been employed to choose 198 of these identifiers, so determining the corresponding teachers (Cochran, 1977).

Hence, the sample encompasses 18 educational institutions and 198 educators from the Nandi area, constituting a significant sample size suitable for conducting comprehensive analysis. Although the provided description lacks specificity, it is worth noting that specific research projects employ a predetermined method to compute the appropriate sample size. The formula in question may consider the desired confidence level, margin of error, and population variance to ascertain an adequate sample size that may effectively identify a significant effect size. A widely used equation for this objective as follows: $E = \sigma^2 * Z^2 * (1 - \alpha)^2 / n$

The formula for calculating the sample size required for estimating a population percentage is $Z * P * (1-P)$, where Z represents the z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level, P represents the estimated proportion of the population with the attribute in question (often set at 0.5 for a cautious estimate). E represents the desired margin of error (Israel, 1992).

The researchers employed a systematic methodology to construct a thorough and representative sample, as seen by the detailed breakdown in this analysis. At the outset, the researchers implemented stratified sampling to ensure proper representation of the diverse range of schools in the County. Then, random selection methods were employed at both the school and teacher levels to uphold objectivity and guarantee that the samples accurately represented the broader population of schools and teachers in Nandi County.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

Instrument Validity

The research instruments underwent a thorough evaluation of face validity to guarantee their effective design in measuring crucial characteristics aligned with the study's goal. Face validity is a concept that pertains to the degree to which a test seems to measure the intended construct. In ensuring face validity, the study confirmed that the questions in the questionnaires directly pertained to the evaluation of teacher-counsellor professionalism and effectiveness in public secondary schools in Nandi County, Kenya. Any questions in the instruments deemed irrelevant to the stated aims were excluded unless they were designed to collect essential general or demographic information from the participants. In order to enhance the credibility of the instruments, the questionnaires underwent a thorough evaluation and approval procedure conducted by a senior faculty member from the University of Nairobi's Department of Educational Administration and Planning. The abovementioned procedure likely involved a rigorous assessment and prospective modifications to enhance the inquiries' comprehensibility, pertinence, and concentration, augmenting the gathered data's credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Instrument Reliability

In order to evaluate the dependability of the research instruments, reliability coefficients were computed for both the questionnaires administered to the students and the questionnaires administered to the

teachers. Reliability in research pertains to the degree of consistency and stability measurements exhibited when obtained under consistent conditions. The reliability coefficient for the students' questionnaire was determined to be ± 0.74 , while for the teacher questionnaires, the coefficient was computed to be ± 0.69 . The estimated coefficients indicate that the instruments exhibit consistency in their measurements. The present study established a minimum criterion of ± 0.5 for accepting the reliability of the surveys.

The questionnaires administered to the students and teachers surpassed the predetermined level, so they were considered reliable for this study. In most research scenarios, a reliability coefficient of 0.7 or above is deemed satisfactory, signifying that the instruments employed in this study were suitably reliable for collecting data about the challenges and professionalism of teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Nandi County, Kenya (Nunnally, 1978). The methods employed for gathering data:

The researchers acquired permission from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) to conduct their study in the designated field of research. The researcher conducted the interviews and gave the questionnaires to the principals, teachers, teacher-counsellors, and students.

Methods of Data Analysis

Various techniques were employed to interpret and draw meaningful conclusions in analysing the collected data. Initially, the responses were coded, assigning numerical or categorical values to the answers provided by the participants. This coding process facilitated the organisation of the data into a tabular form, allowing for transparent and efficient handling and analysis of survey responses. The data was analysed and tabulated using frequencies, which count the number of occurrences of each response, and percentages, which indicate the proportion of a specific response relative to the total. This approach allowed for straightforward and comprehensible descriptions of the survey findings.

III. Results and Discussions

Level of Training in Guidance and Counselling

The level of training teachers in Nandi County, Kenya, possess in guidance and counselling indicates the commitment and understanding that schools in the area have towards this critical department. Notably, the data suggests a notable absence of formal education in guidance and counselling among the teachers sampled, as illustrated in

Table 1

Level of Training in Guidance and Counselling

Qualifications / Level of Training in Guidance and Counselling	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate	0	0%
Diploma	0	0%
KESI Training (Induction Courses)	3	16.7%
1 - 5 Day Seminars	7	38.9%
None	8	44.4%
Total	18	100%

Specifically, none of the teachers had specialised training at the graduate or diploma level. The majority of these teacher-counsellors have primarily engaged in short courses or seminars related to guidance and counselling, with 38.9% (7 out of 18) having attended 1-5 day seminars and 16.7% (3 out of 18) having completed KESI Training (Induction Courses). More concerning, a significant proportion, 44.4% (8 out of 18), reported having no specific training in guidance and counselling (Egbo, 2013).

Length of Service as Head of Guidance and Counseling Department (years)

Based on the data provided in Table 2, it is evident that a considerable proportion of individuals occupying the Head of Guidance and Counseling Department's role in educational institutions are relatively inexperienced in their positions.

Table 2

Length of Service as Head of Guidance and Counseling Department

Length of Service as Head of Guidance and Counseling Department (years)	No of Schools	Percentage
0 - 2	9	50%
2 - 4	6	33.3%
4 - 6	3	16.7%
6 - 8	0	0%
Total	18	100%

Specifically, 50% of these individuals have served in this capacity for a period ranging from 0 to 2 years, 33.3% have held the post for 2 to 4 years, and the remaining 16.7% have accumulated 4 to 6 years of experience in this role. There is no documented evidence on persons who have completed a service period ranging from 6 to 8 years.

The observed proportion of Heads of Guidance and Counseling Departments, amounting to 50%, who have accumulated 0-2 years of experience, may suggest the presence of a notable turnover rate in this particular post or the emergence of novel positions within educational institutions. This finding holds significance as it suggests that these individuals may still comprehend their function and adjust to their obligations (Kolbert et al., 2017). The data reveals that a mere 16.7% of employees have fulfilled a service period ranging from 4 to 6 years, suggesting a notable decline in the number of individuals who choose to maintain their post over an extended period. This finding implies that as individuals in leadership positions accumulate experience, they tend to exhibit higher stability in their roles. The research questions in this study were prepared with the Ecological Systems Theory in mind to evaluate the multiple levels of impact on teacher-counsellors' challenges and their capacity to uphold professional standards. (Aldrup et al., 2018).

A higher proportion of recently appointed Heads in the post may suggest a potential vulnerability to burnout, which could lead to shorter durations of tenure. The observed pattern aligns with prevailing patterns in education, wherein the presence of stress and an excessive workload are known to substantially influence turnover rates (Collie & Martin, 2020).

Persons offering Guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools

The allocation of persons responsible for delivering guidance and counselling services in secondary schools across several roles and responsibilities is as per Table 3.

Table 3

Persons offering Guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools

Persons offering Guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher in charge of guiding and counselling	55	33.74%
Class teacher	44	26.99%
School Principals, Deputy Principals	20	12.27%
Others: priests, chaplains, peer counsellors	44	26.99%
Total	163	100%

With 33.74 per cent of people employed in this position, the teacher supervising and offering guidance and counselling services plays a significant role. Classroom teachers comprise 26.99% of those employed in this position and are subject to strict oversight. On the other hand, there is a noticeable disparity in the participation among the school's upper-level management, specifically the Principals and Deputy Principals, as their involvement in providing guidance and counselling services is comparatively limited, with a mere 12.27% actively engaging in such activities. Furthermore, a significant proportion of these services, precisely 26.99%, are delivered by employees other than the primary providers. This category encompasses individuals such as priests, chaplains, and peer counsellors.

The data demonstrates that members of the teaching faculty administer a substantial proportion of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. When the functions of the teacher in charge of directing and counselling' and the 'Class teacher' are combined, they constitute more than 60% of the individuals responsible for providing these services. The trend above indicates that educational institutions place a significant emphasis on teachers, who may or may not possess formal training in guiding and counselling, to provide these crucial services as corroborated by the findings of Lambie et al. (2019).

Notably, administrative personnel's involvement in these services is limited. According to the data presented, a mere 12.27% of those responsible for providing guidance and counselling services hold the positions of Principal or Deputy Principals. This observation may indicate a possible deficiency in the school's administrative focus or prioritisation of these services within its management plan, as delineated by the National Association for College Admission Counseling and American School Counselor Association (2017).

Summary of findings from interviews

The research included interviews with a sample of 18 principals from secondary schools. According to school principals, a significant challenge teacher-counsellors face is the considerable burden associated with efficiently balancing the responsibilities of teaching and counselling. According to the testimony of respondent (R7), teacher-counsellors frequently encounter substantial expectations, as their instructional responsibilities do not diminish their obligations to deliver counselling services.

Another noteworthy issue concerns the lack of privacy and dedicated spaces for therapy sessions. Several principals have emphasised insufficient resources and tools for teacher-counsellors, hindering their effectiveness in counselling sessions. The importance of establishing a private and inclusive setting that promotes a sense of safety and facilitates unrestricted self-expression was underscored by Respondent (R3).

Regarding maintaining professional boundaries, the principals have collectively agreed that teacher-counsellors generally demonstrate professional conduct while engaging with students. However, numerous administrators have recorded instances in which counsellors have faced challenges in effectively fulfilling their dual roles as both authoritative figures (teachers) and supportive figures (counsellors). Respondent (R12) underscored the continual worry and critical role of maintaining confidentiality as an integral aspect of professionalism in this dual position.

Regarding training and professional development, many principals indicated that teacher-counsellors' training in their respective schools is occasionally inadequate, falling short of the desired degree of comprehensiveness. The principals have conveyed a significant inclination towards increased frequency, enhanced structure, and more depth in professional development opportunities for teacher-counsellors. The significance of ongoing training for our counsellors was underscored by Respondent (R8), who acknowledged the pre-existing expertise possessed by these individuals. Prioritizing it is of utmost importance.

Upon evaluating the support offered by the school administration, principals emphasised the importance of guidance and counselling services. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that there was significant variation in the extent of support offered to teacher-counsellors among various educational institutions. While some principals have affirmed their dedication to assigning specific time for counselling duties and providing particular resources, a considerable proportion has admitted that financial limitations often impede the provision of such assistance. Respondent (R5) constantly emphasised the necessity of augmenting resource allocation, encompassing personnel and financial support, to bolster counselling services.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive portrayal of the committed teacher-counsellors who operate in demanding circumstances within public secondary schools in Nandi County. As per the perspectives provided by school principals, teacher-counsellors encounter significant challenges in managing their extensive workload due to the inherent demands of fulfilling their dual responsibilities as educators and counsellors. The study additionally uncovers notable resource deficiencies, particularly in the availability of dedicated, confidential areas conducive to conducting counselling sessions efficiently. While engaging with learners, teacher-counsellors typically adhere to professional conduct. However, the data underscores the intricacy of balancing many responsibilities and upholding the principle of confidentiality. The current perception is that there is a deficiency in the training and professional development provided to teacher-counsellors. Principals are calling for more comprehensive, organised, and regular chances for staff development in this specific area. Administrators recognise the significance of guidance and counselling services, although they observe substantial variety in the support offered to teacher-counsellors due to financial limitations. Notwithstanding these obstacles, counselling services are usually esteemed by students as a reliable avenue for addressing emotional and academic issues, albeit a stigma surrounding help-seeking behaviour remains prevalent among specific student demographics.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis conducted, the study made the following recommendations:

Educational institutions must give precedence to establishing private and pleasant areas designated explicitly for counselling sessions. This initiative would effectively foster a sense of security and confidentiality among students.

It is necessary to provide resources towards implementing ongoing and all-encompassing training initiatives for teacher-counsellors, aiming to augment their abilities and effectiveness in delivering mental and emotional assistance to learners.

In order to mitigate the substantial workload teacher-counsellors face, it is advisable to establish designated time within their work schedule exclusively for counselling duties. This approach would effectively alleviate the burden associated with juggling several obligations.

It is imperative for educational administrators, with the endorsement of pertinent education authorities, to actively promote and allot augmented resources, encompassing personnel and financial support, to bolster counselling services.

Educational institutions must adopt comprehensive programs to mitigate the negative connotations surrounding seeking mental health assistance while fostering an environment that appreciates and normalises the inclination of students to seek aid.

Regular training and advice for teacher-counsellors are vital to uphold professional limits and protect confidentiality. This is particularly important due to the distinct dual position they assume, serving as both an authoritative figure and a helper.

It is imperative for educational institutions and their administrators to actively promote policies, either at the local or national level, that prioritise the provision of devoted, well-trained, and specialised counselling personnel within school settings. Such policies must be designed to alleviate the workload of educators and enhance the provision of targeted, efficient services to learners.

Educational institutions ought to capitalise on the engagement of a wide range of non-teaching personnel, such as priests, chaplains, and peer counsellors, to deliver comprehensive guidance and counselling services, ensuring seamless integration within a unified support framework for students.

If these proposals are implemented, they can strengthen the support system for students, empower teacher-counsellors, and eventually improve the mental and emotional welfare of the student population in public secondary schools in Nandi County and beyond.

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