

School Counselling as a Function of Students Academic Engagement in Selected Secondary Schools in the North West Region-Cameroon

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Abstract— The purpose of this study was to school counselling as a function of students' academic engagement in selected secondary schools in the North West region of Cameroon.

Students' academic disengagement becomes a serious issue as it prevents educational institutions from achieving educational quality and attaining stated objectives as well. It will further prevent students from fully participating in development processes of the society as many fail, stagnant and drop of the system. This work is based on the hypothetical premise that school counselling has a significant effect on students' engagement in the secondary school. The study used data collected from school counsellors and students of secondary school; and simple random, and purposeful sampling techniques were used to obtain a sample size of 123 counsellors and 543 teachers of government secondary schools in the North West region of Cameroon. The quantitative approach was employed in data collection and analysis. In the quantitative approach, we constructed a questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS); and the following results were obtained in relation to the hypotheses of the study.

- ❖ Counsellor's professional competences affect students' engagements in the secondary school(p-value < 0.05)
- ❖ The quality of Counsellor /student relationship affects students' engagements in the secondary school(p-value < 0.05)

Based on these results recommendations were made to education stakeholders.

Index Terms— school counselling, students' academic engagement, secondary school.

I. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Highlight One of the purposes of education is to impart and build specific knowledge, attitudes and skills in learners. In other words, one can propose that the purpose of education is to ensure the attainment of specific knowledge, attitudes and skills. Thus, learning through students' academic engagement is the purpose around which the educational system is grows.

Considering student outrageous behaviours and other forms of delinquency perpetrated within the school campuses indicates that students are not fully engaged in learning. This means the quality of efforts students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes" (Hu et al, 2001) is wanting. Students' disengagements in learning could be explained by lapses in

secondary school counselling. Counsellor quality and relationship with students could seriously affect students' commitment to learn. Also the prevalence of students' inability to succeed in examinations is a strong indicator of internal inefficiency. The recent increase in the incidence of petition rates and dropout tells us that the system of education is not efficient and that students are not academically engaged to produce the expected output. This system inefficiency could result from lapses registered in school counselling. From the viewpoint of systems theory, a system is internally efficient when the little available inputs are carefully translated into expected results through pertinent transformation processes. Students' disengagement could be very detrimental to the system itself in the sense that school objectives are not met in spite the various resources that are employed. School inefficiency does not provide opportunities to learners to acquire the relevant skills needed to participate in the development process of the society. Internal inefficiency of a school system there leads to exasperated societal stagnation and socioeconomic underdevelopment. This means that inefficient school systems of education educate for underdevelopment and not for development. It is against these shortcomings that we intend to investigate the elements in school counselling that affect students engagements in the secondary school.

Research questions

- How does thequality of Counsellor /student relationship influence students' academic engagements in the secondary school?
- How does the guidance counsellors' professional competences affect students' academicengagements in the secondary school?

Research hypotheses

- The quality of Counsellor/student relationshipaffects students'academic engagements in the secondary school.
- Counsellor's professional competences affect students' academic engagements in the secondary school.

Research objectives

- To study counsellor /student relationshipsas a construct of students'academic engagements in the secondary school.
- To assess the effects of counsellor's professional competences on students' academic engagements in the secondary school.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term student engagement has its roots from a body of work concerned with student involvement. Student engagement is a complex construct, which incorporates numerous definitions. Researchers (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Furlong et al., 2003; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003) have indicated there is inconsistency in the definition of engagement and the terminology used to identify engagement. Examples of varying terminology found in recent literature identifying engagement are: engagement (Audas & Willms, 2001), school engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Furlong et al., 2003; Jimerson et al., 2003), academic engagement (Suarez, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009), student engagement (Chapman, 2002) and student engagement in academic work (Marks, 2000). Despite the inconsistencies in the terminology of engagement, themes have emerged from the research. For example, some definitions contrasted the positive outcome of engagement with the negative result of disengagement (Ogbu, 2003). Some researchers identified the importance of fundamental needs as precursors of engagement (2002; Connell & Deci, 2000). Most definitions tend to include a behavioural component and contain emotional or psychological components. However, few include academic or cognitive components in their definition. Engagement is typically described as multidimensional with two to four components. Researchers adopting a two-component model often include a behavioural element, which has been defined as *exhibiting positive conduct, effort, and participation, and an emotional element, which has been defined as having interest, belonging, and a positive attitude* (Marks, 2000; Williams, 2003). A more recent review of the literature resulted in a three-component model including a cognitive component, which has been defined as having self-regulation, learning goals, and an investment in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2003). Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) described engagement as having three components, which include behavioral, cognitive, and motivational. Similarly to Fredricks et al. (2004) and Jimerson et al. (2003), Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) describe behavioural engagement as observable behaviour that can easily be seen by the teacher, such as completing assignments and class participation.

Student engagement has become the focus of attention, among those aiming to enhance learning and teaching in higher education, headlining meeting agendas and teaming conferences in campuses around the world. Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institution with the main intention of optimizing the student experience and enhancing the learning outcomes and development of student and the performance and reputations of the institutions. Harper et al.(2009), says engagement is more than involvement or participation, acting without feeling engaged is just involvement or even compliance. Feeling engaged without acting is dissociation. The school counsellors there for has this responsibility to use quality techniques and strategies to guide students efforts towards involvement in learning. Fredrick's et al 2004

focusing on engagement at a school level identified three dimensions to student engagement: Behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement.

Behavioural engagement

Behaviourally engaged pupils would typically comply with behavioural norms such as attendance and involvement and would demonstrate the absence of disruptive or negative behaviour.

Emotional engagement

Pupils who are emotionally engaged would experience affective reaction such as interest enjoyment or a sense of belonging.

Cognitive engagement

Cognitively, engaged pupils would be invested in their learning, would seek to go beyond the requirements and would relish change. Pupils can engage positively or negatively along the behavioural, emotional or cognitive dimensions.

Investment in education is essential for both personal growth and economic development. Basic learning needs are defined in terms of the essential learning tools and work with dignity, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning (UNESCO, 1996). Economically, the developing countries that have gained the most from integrating the world economy have shown impressive gains in education (World Bank, 2002). Because of the demand created by expanded schooling and the need for an ever better educated work force, investment in secondary education has become extremely important in developing countries.

Students' engagement in learning has been accepted as a multidimensional construct since it measures a variety of different aspects of teaching and learning such as; subject mastery, effective communication, lesson preparation and presentation. The influence of pupils engagement in learning has been the subject of several studies (Adediwura and Tayo, 2007). The above studies suggest that effective teaching is a significant predictor of students' academic engagement. Therefore, effective teachers should motivate pupils to engage more in learning activities. Poor academic performance of which is a result of poor s learners' engagement in learning has been linked to poor teachers' performance in terms of accomplishing the teaching task, negative attitude to work and poor teaching habits, which have been attributed to poor motivation (Ofoegbu 2004). On the other hand, laxity in the provision of counselling services could also failed to ignite behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement/involvement in learning. It is obvious that only highly motivated and committed counsellors can produce quality results.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in selected secondary schools in the North West region of Cameroon. The approach adopted for this study was the mixed method approach, which comprise the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. The rationale for this is optimise the understanding of the phenomenon under observation from various foci. The proportionate sampling technique was used to obtain a

sample size of 123 counsellors and 543 teachers. The main instrument of data collection was the questionnaire.

The Cronbach's Coefficient alpha (α), of the instruments was established in order to determined the resliability. The Cronbach's Coefficient alpha (α), is expressed as:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum \sigma_k^2}{\sigma^2} \right)$$

Where:

$\sum \sigma_k^2$ is the sum of the variances of the k parts which are the items of the test or instrument.

σ = standard deviation of the test or instrument.

After two weeks, we re-administered the instrument (questionnaire) to the same group of respondents (teachers). The scores were encoded in SPSS and we obtained a

coefficient of stability index of 0.8. This coefficient stability is significant. This shows that the instrument had a good test and re-test reliability.

The analysis of data was carried out using the spearman rank correlation. The spearman correlation is expressed as:

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \sum D^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

Where:

Σ = sum

D is the difference between the ranks of X and the corresponding ranks of Y

n= the number of paired ranks

IV. PRESENTATION OF DATA

Table 1. Challenges faced by counsellors

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of cooperation from school administration.	124	1,7697	,85103
Lack of corporation from fellow staff members	124	2,1067	1,01807
No support of the department by the principal	122	2,0955	,89315
Students are unwilling to discuss their problems with guidance counsellors.	124	1,9466	,88491
Lack of reading and reference material resources to enhance effectiveness.	123	1,9466	,88491
Heavy teaching load for the teacher-counsellor	120	2,1713	1,04078
Counsellor –students ratio	121	1,8427	,98260

1= Very Serious challenge, 2= Serious Challenge, 3= Fairly Serious Challenge, 4= Minor Challenge, 5= Not A challenge.

From the table one, it is clear that guidance counsellors face enormous challenges in various areas of counselling in the secondary school. The means range between 1.8 and 2.1 indicating that the challenges are very serious and serious. Prominent among these challenges are lack of cooperation from school administrators, students unwillingness to discuss their problems with counsellors at individual levels, Lack of

reading and reference material resources to enhance effectiveness and counsellor –students ratio. Lack of corporation between school administration and counsellors is a clear indication that counselling services cannot be done successfully.

Table 2. Students' opinion on the quality of counselling/student relationship

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Educational guidance given at school helped me pursue the right type of education.	543	4,1897	1,19258
Guidance and counselling assisted me in making informed decisions about my education.	541	3,3812	1,42337
I had the choice of which stream of education to pursue.	543	4,2983	0,42957
I had a smooth transition from home to school, from primary to secondary school, and from secondary to higher-secondary educational institutions.	542	3,3683	1,46442
Counsellors helped me to cope with examination anxiety and fear of failure that discouraged me from striving for the highest grades.	543	3,2302	1,08189
I developed effective study habits.	541	4,4107	0,35520

School Counselling as a Function of Students Academic Engagement in Selected Secondary Schools in the North West Region-Cameroon

Guidance and counselling assisted me in improving my competence in reading, note-taking, and academic achievement.	543	3,3278	1,37160
Guidance and counselling provided me with meaningful educational experiences.	542	4,4236	1,38826
Counsellors visit you in your classrooms to give you practical advice	543	3,1091	1,52787
Counsellors relate with your parents to discuss on your performance in school	541	4,1897	1,19258
I appreciate my counsellor for the excellent job he/she has done in my life	543	3,3812	1,42337

1= Strongly agreed, 2= Agreed, 3= Uncertain, 4= Disagreed, 5= Strongly disagreed.

Source: students' questionnaire

Looking at students data on the quality of counselling service we can easily diagnose that many students do not have direct benefits of counselling services in their institutions. This is highly marred by students' inaccessibility to counsellors. We observed that the design and organisation counsellors offices were not appropriate for individual counselling to take places between counsellors and students,

and this is one of the main reasons students hardly meets counsellors in personal basis. During counsellor sessions in classrooms, students' indiscipline behaviours resulting from large class sizes prevent counsellors from doing their job effectively.

Table 3. Counsellor Professional Competences

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Counselling is always counselee-centred, and the counselee plays a proactive role	124	3,343	1,4381
Counselling in a classroom situation involves the utilization of various resources which are not readily available in your school	122	2,248	1,3824
Counselling for personal, emotional, and social problems is much the responsibility of the parents, not the counsellor in our school	124	3,514	1,3506
Guidance and counselling practices have solved problems related to students' indiscipline.	123	3,422	1,4262
The role of a counsellor plays a significant role in enhancing academic performance	120	2,556	1,2732
The training you receive enables you to solve students difficult to a greater extent	123	2,076	1,3612
The frequency of students into your office to seek for advice is high	120	3,406	1,3258
The school administration has provided you with enough tools to enhance effective counselling	124	4,782	1,2385

1= Strongly agreed, 2= Agreed, 3= Uncertain, 4= Disagreed, 5= Strongly disagreed.

Source: Counsellor's questionnaire

This table measures counsellors' opinion about the professionalism in the counselling profession. Majority of the counsellors are not certain whether counselling service are counselee centred or not and are not aware whether the counselee should play a proactive role or not. This permits us to question the quality of their training and the quality of the counselling process as well. In the second item respondents disagreed that the availability of salient tools to enhance

proper counselling sessions are not present; and many of them are not certain whether parents provide effective counselling to their children at home. Summarily respondents' views pertaining to counsellor professionalism prove that professional counselling is lacking in several cases and this constitutes one of the reasons students engagement is seriously wanting in the secondary school.

Table 4. Students' Engagement

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Behavioural engagement			
Students involvement/ commitment in learning	120	3,0534	,89755
Students indiscipline	124	4,9972	,85744
Students participation in classroom activities	123	3,7946	,79778
Emotional engagement			
Students enjoy attending class	120	2,8640	,86844
Students absenteeism	124	2,1027	,99774
Students like to belong to the school community	123	3,0695	,92344
Cognitive engagement			
Academic performances	120	4,8427	,98260
Verbal participation	124	1,9275	,84613
Students attention in class	123	3,8640	,86844

1= Very high, 2= high, 3= average, 4= low, 5= very low

Source: Teachers questionnaire

Table 4 above measures teachers' opinions on students' involvement or engagement in the teaching learning process at the behavioural, cognitive and emotional levels. It is clear that at the various levels of engagement, majority of students are either highly or averagely academically engaged. Verbal participation appears to be very high but does not

correlate with cognitive participation. When students' absenteeism is high, it means that student program coverage percentage will likely be low and as such will not perform as expected. Students indiscipline behaviours is a strong indicator that school administration, counsellors, teachers and other stake holders do not collaborate to in the exercise of their duty.

V. TESTING RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Hypotheses one:

Ha: The quality of Counsellor /student relationship affects students' engagements in the secondary school

Ho: The quality of Counsellor /student relationship does not affect students' engagements in the secondary school

Table 5. Correlations

			Quality of Counsellor /student relationship	Students' academic engagements
Spearman's rho	Quality of Counsellor /student relationship	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,724**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
		N	124	543
	Students' academic engagements	Correlation Coefficient	,724**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
		N	543	124

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is 0.724 and the p-value is less than 0.05. here we reject the statistical hypothesis and retain the alternative hypothesis which states that the quality of Counsellor /student relationship significantly affects students' engagements in the secondary school Students' academic engagements is significant.

Hypothesis two:

Ha: Counsellor's professional competences affect students' engagements in the secondary school

Ho: Counsellor's professional competence does not affect students' engagements in the secondary school

Table 5. Correlations

			Counsellor's professional competences	Students' academic engagements
Spearman's rho	Counsellor's professional competences	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,648**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
		N	124	541
	Students' academic engagements	Correlation Coefficient	,648**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	.
		N	541	124

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is 0.648 and the p-value is less than 0.05. This permits us to reject the statistical hypothesis and retain the alternative hypothesis which stipulates that counsellor's professional competences significantly affect students' engagements in the secondary school. Students' academic engagements is significant.

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Within the context of this paper it has been found out that school counselling is a significant determinant of students' engagements in the secondary school. The p-values for all the tested hypotheses are less than the alpha of 0.05. These results corroborate with the findings of Basikin, (2007) who found out that counsellor and teacher engagement is a contributing factor to improving student

engagement and academic achievement, and if a correlational relationship exists between student engagement and counsel / teacher engagement, and that correlational relationship is a sign of a causal relationship between counsel / teacher and student engagement, then an increase in counsel / teacher engagement will lead to an increase in student engagement. This could greatly optimise students' discipline and equally enhance academic performance to a greater extent.

Student academic engagement is a fundamental component essential to the process of teaching and learning and paramount to the successful academic advancement and achievement of students (National Research Council, 2004). The concept of student academic engagement emerged from the discourse regarding unsuccessful efforts to target academic underachievement to remedy falling standards, inordinately high levels of student failure, repetition and disproportionately high dropout rates registered in the past decades (Fredricks et al., 2004). In the available research literature there are clear indications of the connection between academic engagement and high academic achievement (Ogbu, 2003). Several motivational theories have been the foundation for research studies that indicate that when specific psychological variables are addressed, student engagement is increased (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Here the school counsellor is most appropriately placed to address these psychological variables which can either mar or make up students' engagements depending on the way they are

manipulated. One theory of motivation, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), suggests that learning occurs when students are cognitively and emotionally engaged. Ryan and Deci's (2000) motivational theory affords educators a greater understanding of student needs by the educational facilitators and relevant stakeholders. These authors identify three types of factors influencing achievement. They are competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence involves understanding and self-efficacy, relatedness involves making connections, and autonomy involves taking an active role in one's own learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An well trained and fully engaged counsellor can play a significant role in helping students develop these values. By understanding a student's inherent needs, counsellors can relate to students in a way that encourages internal motivation for engagement in the educative process.

Similar to the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000), Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory emphasizes the need for balance between academic rigor and skill development.

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