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Evaluation of Counseling Strategies on Internet Use among Students in Public Secondary Schools in Kabuchai Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate counseling strategies and interventions based on internet use (IU) among learners in Kabuchai Subcounty, Bungoma County. The objective of this study was to evaluate the IU awareness programs, IU supervision and examine use of physical activities as IU interventional strategies among learners in public secondary school students in Kabuchai Sub County, Bungoma County, Kenya. The respondents were teacher counselors who were given 3 items to respond to; awareness programs, supervision and physical activities. The target population of the study was all the teacher counselors in public secondary schools in Kabuchai County, Bungoma County, Kenya. There were 26 public secondary schools in Kabuchai sub county, Bungoma County posting 26 counselors. This meant that 1 main school counselor was selected from each school. Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. Saturated sampling procedure was used to come up with the sample size for the study where the entire population translated into sample size. A questionnaire based on the counselor's demographics and a set of strategies were developed and administered to the respondents. Finally data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and presented in tables of frequencies and percentages. The findings of the study revealed that the three basic counseling strategies and interventions, that is physical activities, supervision and awareness sessions were not adequately utilized for assisting the learner resolve challenges related to IU. However use of physical activities was the most embraced interventional strategy among the counselors thus reducing learner free time. The study recommended use of more non- physical strategies and interventions such as media literacy education, healthy family interactions, supervision, drama and sex education.

Keywords: Internet Use, School counselors, counseling strategies

I. Introduction

As Kenya struggle towards the attainment of vision 2030, a lot of effort has to be made in terms of technology use in all the sectors of the economy and more importantly in the educational sector. Learner exposure to technology use in Kenyan schools is in compliance with the government's ICT policy of 2006 and 2013 to foster quick economic development, global awareness and motivation among learners for embracing the 21st century skills. However use of technology has its side effects which should be addressed among learners such as cyber-crime, IU abuse and existence of harmful sites on the web and more importantly waste of study time on non-educative media. IU among learners therefore requires professional guidance to avoid the undesirable effects that technology may have on their behavior. Parents, teachers and all educational stakeholders should take up responsibility and a leading role in guiding and teaching young users of technology its benefits and risks. The greatest responsibility therefore rests with the teacher counselors at school and parents at home in all public secondary schools in Kenya.

A professional counselor is trained to be creative and sensitive to various aspects of counseling that may affect the physical, environmental, emotional, mental and technological wellbeing of the learners. This study investigated on awareness of ICT use related counseling issues, supervision and physical activities as strategies and interventions used by counselors in handling of the negative effects of internet use among students in 26 public secondary

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schools in Kabuchai sub county. The results revealed that teachers do not supervise learner online activities and also failed to sensitize learners on good use of technology. Physical activities were the only interventional measure used to engage learners in sports and games to break their IU. The research recommends for an eclectic approach where various strategies and counseling therapies for handling IU are adopted among learners in this digital dispensation.

II. Background

According to Dahir (2009), a school counseling program focuses on issues such as strategies to enhance academic performance, career awareness, employment readiness and communication skills. Currently in the 21st century, IU has become increasingly an important area of counseling which counselors must factor in their counseling programs. Today a school counseling program should include issues related to IU such as anxiety, addiction, depression and stress management, technology abuse, cyber bullying and waste of time among students (Burt, Conselez, Swank & Asher, 2011). Technology related problems are now critical as learners continue to use technology which is unsupervised by parents, teachers and counselors. Learners end up surfing harmful sites which may have direct impact on their behavior.

Previous researches have undermined technology use as an important area of counseling which currently has raised concern among parents and educational stakeholders. The demographic characteristics of counselors such educational level, age and experience determine the effectiveness and level of creativity to handle emerging problems such as those of IU. For instance the older counselors whom we may respect for their experience and wisdom may be hesitant on issues of technology while we expect young counselors to be well versed with technology issues. Counseling is a dynamic field which should change concurrently with the technological revolution. As more schools adopt technology coupled with the unsupervised IU among learners, anxiety and stress develop fast among learners (Burt, Conselez, Swank & Asher, 2011). Competence in counseling is pegged on the professional accreditation of the counselor, the highest of which is a degree (Caldwell & Cunningham, 2010). Today the emergency of behavioral addiction to internet among students is an issue that school counselors should not take lightly because it is real and would seriously damage the psychological wellbeing of the learners (Caldwell & Cunningham, 2010). Emerging counseling issues that may affect learners' psychological wellbeing such as uncontrolled IU and abuse among learners need to be handled with high level skill and creativity in the counseling process. Apart from the psychological harm, learners waste time surfing internet on useless sites, avoid classes, drop in grades and finally end up dropping out of school completely (Block, 2008).

School counselors should hence be creative to engage with students in constructive and creative activities that are more exploratory and healthy to meet their growth and personality needs. Counselors should focus on IU symptoms such as lateness after lunch hours and after school, overly tiredness, sleepy eyes, dropping grades and missing of classes among learners (Block, 2008). Caldwell & Cunningham, (2010), noted that there was no IU

programs and interventions adopted in secondary schools in South Korea where IU among the youth had been declared a national tragedy.

The awareness of the positive as well as negative effects of unsupervised student online activities by parents and teachers is crucial and firsthand information. Teachers should have knowledge of IU abuse among learners to be able to design awareness programs for helping learners while parents need to have the same awareness to be able to supervise and guide their children on online activities. Society has however been quiet about IU abuse as they watch their children use internet to worrying levels. In the Middle East, Asia and the Western European countries where technology use was widely allowed in schools, most parents and teachers were said to have lacked knowledge about IU abuse among their children (Kimbrow, 2007).

A similar research in India revealed that the rate of internet access among the youth was 6.9 % of which 18 million young people had knowledge of internet mostly accessed from cybercafés (Chakraborty & Basu 2010). It was also noted that more than 400,000 sexually explicit sites were visited by teens without age entry requirement verification in the USA (De Angelis, 2009). IU among students therefore becomes a challenging area of counseling that school counselors need to have knowledge about, skills and strategies to handle. Edogarn (2007) in his research on the effects of IU among the youth established that physical and social interactions among the learners had been replaced by student online activities and he suggested that students be given time for physical and social activities to provide a break from online activities.

To prevent IU problems among learners, various strategies and interventions have been proposed by researchers to help school counselors guide learners on how to use internet without harming themselves. The counselors should increase the awareness of IU problems among learners and be able to gather and distribute relevant information to learners. They should also provide key strategies to parents for monitoring and restructuring IU (supervision). Counselors should also provide classroom guidance on the aspect of reducing the number of hours learners surf internet and also encourage them to participate in physical activities (Block, 2008). Other strategies include: replacing internet with true life activities, use of internet curriculum in schools, promoting positive interactions among families, use of appropriate and effective family monitoring skills and assisting families to reduce maladaptive family functions (Caldwell & Cunningham, 2010).

In Kenyan schools, students are not allowed to possess and use mobile phones within the school premises but use of technology outside the school is uncontrolled and widely embraced by students. It was reported that over 40% of secondary school students in Kenya were addicted to internet use (Coalition Working in Kenya to protect Children from Internet Abuse, 2010). Parents have therefore failed to realize that IU abuse among students may be harmful to their children and that they have to play a major role in controlling of their children's' online activities because it is mostly accessed outside schools and during holidays (Kamande 2011).

Replacing IU with real life activities is an IU control strategy where learners come to terms with the reality of life rather than over relying on fictional foreign materials

and situations. The IU connectivity among learners is indeed an enormous challenge that needs to be addressed by school counselors. Students should be taught how to use technology positively such as enriching their personal communication skills, collaborative learning and academic research (Dahir, 2009).

To mitigate to IU challenges, Chou (2007) recommended IU awareness programs to be implemented in schools, colleges and universities to reduce the potential danger of IU abuse among school children. Schools and colleges should therefore incorporate media literacy in school curriculum, where young learners are taught healthy uses of internet for proper growth. Media literacy and digital communications where issues such as pornography and online bullying are addressed are critical aspects of school counseling.

The parents have a critical role to play in children healthy growth, development, communication and interaction with their children to enhance healthy family interactions. Problems affecting children would be handled with care and concern to avoid jeopardizing the future of young learners. The use of communication technology in homes should be taken with caution so as to yield positive results on children behaviors. Parents who do not adhere to healthy parenting styles may cause delinquency among children which may lead to IU problems. Parents, who own and use computers in their homes, must monitor their children's online activities (Caldwell & Cunningham, 2010).

Research has shown that there are a few trained teacher counselors handling counseling in secondary schools in Kenya. According to Ngumi, Sindabi, Ngari, Kariuki & Mumiukha (2011), teacher counselors have inadequate training in guidance and counseling in schools. Therefore for effective IU counseling and supervision to be realized, counselors should be trained in the most current skills to handle new and emerging challenges among the learners such as the IU.

1.0 Research Methodology

This study adopted quantitative research design where descriptive survey was used. This design was suitable for an in-depth description of the phenomena in their existing environment. It is also cost effective when the researcher handles large samples (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The study was conducted in Kabuchai Sub County, Bungoma County Kenya. There were 26 public secondary schools in the entire Sub County where 1 main school counselor was selected from each school. The study targeted all school counselors in Kabuchai Sub County numbering 26 according to the number of schools. Saturated sampling technique was used to select all the teacher counselors due to their small number. Data was collected by means of questionnaire developed and administered to respondents. The quantitative responses were analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data analysis generated frequencies and percentages which were tabulated and finally analyzed through descriptive statistics.

III. Statement of the Problem

Student online activities are enormous calling for attention from teacher counselors, parents and all education stakeholders to address challenges of the 21st digital dispensation. This is to allow learners to exploit internet in

a healthy and beneficial manner. IU counseling should be incorporated in the general counseling programs of the school. Use of mobile phones for instance has made it easy for students to access various sites some of which may not be healthy. Students who spent most of their time on chatting platforms waste most of their valuable time at home for study and therefore need guidance.

IV Objective of the study

The specific objective of the study was to evaluate IU counseling strategies and interventions with specific reference to awareness programs, supervision and physical activities among students in Kabuchai Sub County, Bungoma County, Kenya.

2.0 Research question

What are teacher-counselor responses on IU awareness programs, IU supervision and physical activities among students in public secondary schools in Kabuchai Sub County?

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted quantitative research methods where descriptive survey and descriptive statistics were used to collect and analyze data respectively. Descriptive survey design enabled the researcher to define new relationships between variables without manipulating them. The sample size was 26 counselors representing 26 schools in the sub county. Data was collected through questionnaires and analyzed through SPSS.

V. Results and Discussion

The results and discussions of the study were based on responses on demographic characteristics and a set of 3 items that is on awareness, supervision and physical activities upon which the objective of the study was based. Teacher - counselor demographics are discussed specifically in relation to IU among students in public secondary schools in Kabuchai sub-county and constitute an important aspect of the study. Counselors' responses on awareness, supervision and physical activities have been summarized and discussed.

4.0 Sample Characteristics

The counselors who participated in the study were 15 females and 9 males. Counselors selected for the main study were 24, while 2 teachers who were involved in the piloting phase were excluded from the study. Majority (62.5%) of the counselors were aged between 31- 45 years, most them drawn from mixed schools. This was indeed an energetic counseling force expected to handle students' problems.

5.0 Demographic Information

Counselors were asked to show their gender, age, experience, qualifications in counseling as per the section A of the teachers' questionnaire.

5.1 Gender distribution of the Counselors

Counselors were asked to indicate their gender in section A of the questionnaire. Table 1.1 indicates the gender distribution of the counselors.

Table 1.1: Gender distribution of Counselors

	Gender	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	9	37.5
	Female	15	62.5
	Total	24	100

Table 1.1 indicates that there were more female counselors 15 (62.5%) than male counselors 9 (37.5 %). Female counselors were most preferred than male counselors. This could be attributed to their motherly nature of understanding the needs of children and hence their students.

5.2 Age Distribution of Respondents

Counselors were asked to indicate their age as per section A of the Counselors’ questionnaire. Table 1.2 shows the age distribution of counselors.

Table 1.2: Age distribution of Counselors

	Age	Frequency	Percent
Valid		4	16.7
		16	66.7
		4	16.7
Total		24	100

From table 1.2 there were 4 (16.7%) respondents aged between 20-30 years while 16 (66.7%) respondents were aged between 31-45 years and 4 (16.7%) respondents were aged 46 and above. The majority of teacher counselors were aged between 31-45 constituting 66.7%. These were fairly young individuals who should be well versed with the current educational issues and

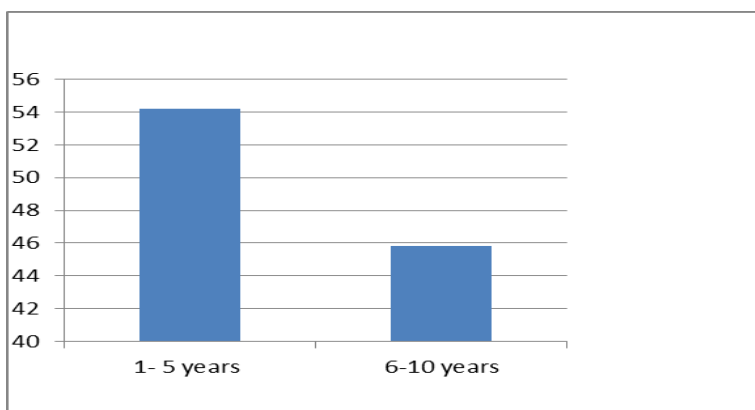


Fig. 1.1: Counselors’ experience in Counseling

Figure 1.1 shows that 54.2% of the respondents had experience of between 1-5 years while 45.8% had experience of between 6 – 10 years. This implies that less experienced counselors were more than experienced counselors; counseling was left in the hands of unprofessional.

6.0. Counselors’ responses on awareness of Students’ Knowledge on IU

Counselors were asked to indicate their perceptions on statements on awareness of students’ IU which is knowledge of internet and their visitation to cybercafés. Table 1.4 shows teachers’ responses on students’ knowledge of IU and cybercafés.

Table 1.4: Counselors’ Responses on Students’ Knowledge on IU and Cybercafés

Statement	YES		NO	
	F	%	F	%
Students have knowledge of IU	19	79.2	5	20.8
Students ever visit cybercafés	15	62.5	9	37.5

From table 1.4, 19 (79.2%) of the counselors responded ‘YES’ to the statement: Students have knowledge of internet. 15 (62.5%) of counselors also responded ‘YES’ to the statement: Students ever

trends in modern technology use among students. There were however few 4 (16.7%) counselors aged between 20-30 years and 46 years and above. It was therefore expected that 66 (66.7%) of counselors aged 31-45 should constitute a vibrant force of counselors able to help students on IU challenges.

5.3 Qualifications of Counselors

Teacher - counselors were asked to indicate their level of qualifications as per section A of the teachers’ questionnaire. Table 1.3 shows the counselors’ professional qualifications in counseling.

Table 1.3: Qualifications of Counselors

	Qualification	Frequency	percent
Valid	Untrained	19	79.2
	Trained graduate % Above	5	20.8
	Total	24	100

Table 1.3 reveals that 19 (79.2%) of the counselors were untrained and 5 (20.8%) were graduates and above. There were no diploma and certificate holders in counseling. This implies that most counseling services in public secondary schools were offered by untrained counselors who may have been appointed by the school administration.

9.0 Counselors’ Experience in Counseling

Counselors were asked to indicate their experience in counseling. Figure 1.1 shows counselors’ experience in counseling.

visit cybercafés, while 5 (20.8%) and 9 (37.5%) of the counselors responded ‘NO’ to the statements: Students have knowledge of IU and students ever visit cybercafés respectively. This implies that a very high percentage of students had knowledge of internet and had visited cybercafés’ according to the counselors’ perceptions.

7.0 IU Counseling Strategies and Interventions among Students

The second objective sought to evaluate the strategies used by counselors among students. Counselors were set to respond to three aspects constituting simple and basic strategies and interventions that can easily and cheaply be implemented. Counselors were presented with 3 items that is, awareness campaigns, and supervision of IU and physical activities. Table 1.5 shows the counselors responses on the selected strategies and interventions.

Table 1.5: IU Counseling Strategies and Interventions

Strategy / intervention	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Awareness campaigns	1	4.2	1	4.2	-	-	14	58	8	33	24
Supervision	-	-	3	12.5	4	16.7	11	45.8	6	25.0	24
Physical activities	1	4.2	14	58.3	4	16.7	4	16.7	1	4.2	24

Table 1.5 reveals that counselors who strongly agreed to have employed awareness programs were 1 (4.2%) and those who agreed were 1 (4.2%), while those who strongly disagreed were 8 (33%) and those who disagreed were 14 (58.3%), those who disagreed were 14 (58.3%). This data indicates that few counselors (5%) embraced awareness campaigns while over 30% of the respondents never embraced awareness campaigns as a counseling intervention for IU challenges. This hence implies lack of awareness programs in schools.

8.0. Counselors' responses on IU supervision programs

Research objective of the study sought to investigate IU supervision among students in public secondary schools in Kabuchai Sub County. From table 1.5 the findings indicate that respondents who strongly agreed to have supervised student IU activities were 0 (0.0%) while those who strongly disagreed were 6 (25%). Counselors who agreed to have employed the supervision were 0 (0.0%) while those who disagreed were 11 (45.8%). Therefore more counselors strongly disagreed 6 (25%) and disagreed 11 (45.8%) than those who strongly agreed (0.00%) and those who agreed (0.00%). This implies lack of supervision of IU among teachers.

9.0. Counselors' responses on physical activities programs

The objective of this study sought to assess the use of physical activities with regard to IU. From table 1.5, the findings indicate that counselors who strongly agreed to have involved students in physical activities as an IU intervention were 1 (4.2%) and those who agreed were 14 (58.3%) while respondents who strongly disagreed were 1 (4.2%) and those agreed were 4 (16.7%). Therefore more counselors (58.3%) seem to have embraced use of physical activities. This hence implies presence of physical activities as intervention to reduce student online activities.

Discussion

Results on the age indicate that there were more young counselors compared to older counterparts. This could indicate a serious counseling challenge where young teachers who may also be experiencing the same problems as their learners fail to be good role models to the learners. Age is a key factor that may affect the counseling process as posited by Burt, Gonzalez, Swank & Asher (2011) who found out that older counselors are hesitant to technology issues. The age bracket (31-45 years) were the majority in this study and chances were that they were relatively young and more less experienced in counseling but were expected to be conversant with technological issues in counseling compared to counselors aged above 46 years. Counselors in the age bracket (20- 30 years) are young individuals are also at risk of facing challenges on IU during their counseling practice. The finding on the age concur with, Gonzalez, Swank & Asher (2011).

The findings on the academic level of professionals indicate that there were few highly qualified counselors (at degree level). Lack of enough professionals worsens the counseling situation especially when handling IU; because this requires application of high counseling skills and interventions. This condition should be dealt with through expansion of higher level training for counselors and enhancing of professionalism in counseling. The 5 (20.8%)

who were graduates and above, were inadequate and may not have catered for the psychological needs of the students with regard to IU. Therefore students' needs regarding IU may have been in jeopardy as counseling was left in the hands of unprofessional team. These findings concur with the findings by Ngumi, Sindabi, Ngari, Karuiki & Mumiukha (2011) who established that there was inadequate high level training among secondary school counselors in Kenya

The findings on counselors' experiences reveal inadequacy in terms of handling the new technological issues. Counselor characteristics such as experience may affect the level and quality of counseling process and this concurs with Wango & Mungai, (2007) who found out that experience in counseling indeed affected the counseling process. It is clear therefore that the less experienced counselors on matters of IU may not have performed to the expectation than the more experienced counselors deemed helpful to students on IU, due to their limited counseling experience. Experience in counseling may help the counselors in understanding how students behave regarding social life challenges and also counselors must understand the basics of internet. Out of long experience in counseling, counselors may devise strategies and plans of dealing with specific problems. Students' problems such as inappropriate IU and its challenges may not be handled effectively and therefore untrained counselors encountered serious counseling challenges; hence failing to handle IU counseling among students effectively. There is a need to employ more experienced teacher counselors to assist students overcome IU challenges. This could be attributed to the fact that cybercafés were accessible and cheap to the youth. Lack of strict laws regarding use of cybercafés, parental and teacher guidance may also have contributed to students' visiting cybercafés. This therefore calls for appropriate application of counseling skills and interventions by all the counselors to educate students on risks and benefits of IU rather than denying them the information which they already have. Failure of counselors to address IU challenges among students could also be attributed to the casual approach on IU by society and stakeholders like policy makers and leaders whereby nobody ever raised concern about it; and if efforts were ever made there was lack of utter commitment and seriousness to this end. These findings concur with Grover, Chakraborty & Basu (2010) who found out that 81 million Indian (6.9%) had knowledge of internet of which the youth constituted 72% accessing internet from cybercafés. The awareness of IU among students is the most basic aspect of IU and upon which the counseling strategies are formulated; lack of which IU counseling may not take place at all. Teachers might have lacked awareness of student IU abuse due to negligence and ignorance of the

society where nobody seems to be concerned. Counselors may have been strict on IU within schools, especially the possession of mobile phones by students but fail to control IU outside school. Therefore counselors who were not aware of IU abuse may not have used awareness programs to help reduce IU challenges among students. These findings concur with the findings of Caldwell & Cunningham (2010), who established that teacher-counselors lacked awareness of IU by their children and never sensitized students on IU.

The finding on IU supervision indicates absence of parental as well as counselors' supervision which may have risked learners landing wrong sites. Supervision of students' IU activities is a challenge especially outside schools because those who do not have mobile phones may access cybercafés away from their homes. In cybercafés, no one cares what young individuals surf on internet. Parents may not have seen reason to supervise their childrens' online activities. Teacher- counselors on the other hand, may have restricted mobile phone use in schools and took no trouble to supervise students on IU challenges. These findings show that counselors had failed to supervise student online activities. The findings concur with the findings by Block (2008) who found out that teachers had never supervised students' IU activities, especially during holidays where they could spent a lot of their free time interacting with friends, visiting relatives and on internet for those with knowledge of computers. The finding also concur with De Angelis (2009), who established that American teens and preteens who accessed unsupervised internet visited one or more of the 400,000 sexually explicit sites on the web, many of which required no verification of legal age entry.

The explanation for the finding on physical activities could be attributed to the fact that in schools, co-curricular activities such as games and physical activities are compulsory and all students are supposed to engage in physical activities. Counselors may have taken advantage of the existence of games in schools to indicate that they had involved students in physical activities to curb problematic IU. This concur with the finding of Edorgan (2008) who established that internet had displaced social and physical activities among teenagers and therefore there was need for involving students in physical activities

VII Conclusion

The counselors' level of training was low and majority of the counselors were young. Female counselors were more than the male counselors. The use of IU awareness programs was minimally used by the counselors (5%). IU supervision registered (0.00%), meaning no supervision of IU was ever carried out. The use of physical activities was the most readily embraced (58.3% strongly agreed) as an IU intervention employed by the counselors. The key intervention, that is, awareness campaigns, was least employed, in handling IU in public secondary schools in Kabuchai sub county. The major finding of this study was that counselors, majority of whom had low qualifications never used IU awareness as well IU supervision but their use of physical activities helped them to moderate IU activities among learners.

VIII Recommendations

The researcher recommends that counselors should be able to use a wide range of strategies and skills such use of media literacy, health family interaction programs and supervision and awareness programs. A similar research should therefore be conducted in other sub counties in Kenya to confirm the finding of this study.

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