

Aligning the Ethiopian Education Policy and School Support Practices in Secondary Schools

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Executive Summary

This policy brief is concerned with the current education policy of Ethiopia – the 2023 education and training policy of Ethiopia. The service has been offered in Ethiopian schools since 1970s. It was introduced in to schooling and the education system in general with a conviction that it would deliver psychosocial support to students and thereby enabling them to be successful academically. However, it was not given proper attention by policy makers. It was realized that because of policy ignoring of guidance and counseling the provision would not be effective in delivering services to students, the profession unable to have its own job description guideline and the professionals could not have the opportunity to have institutional placement in the administrative offices at federal level or regional levels. All these problems, which are the outcomes of policy limitation, brought impairment in achieving quality of education, which was one of the objectives of the policy. Thus, we recommend to the ministry of education that for school counseling services to be effective and contribute for quality of education the current education and training policy of Ethiopia has to be reformed with serious consideration of the recognition of guidance and counseling. The improved policy has to also indicate providing counseling to students is mandatory to schools and right to students and for the professional school counselors it has to set direction for the designing of national job description guideline that can indicate the rights and responsibilities of the professionals and measurements of its effectiveness.

1. Introduction

counseling in schools enable students to overcome the encounters of students, such as academic difficulties (Yulianti-yulianti, et.al., 2024) and the problem of low self-efficacy (Ahmad Wahid and Neviyarni, 2024). Guidance and counseling contributes for learning difficulties to be manageable so that success in academics, which is one of the aspects of quality education, would

become achievable. For a student to be successful academically his/her psychological well-being has to be maintained and this is possible through guidance and counseling. These and other research findings indicates that quality learning of students as well as the overall effectiveness of educational system is rooted in the service achieved by guidance and counseling. That is why modern educational system has made school counseling services as an integral part of the policies, programs and procedures of educational system (Esuong, Eyo & Joshua, 2007).

For instance, as the works of Carron & Chau (1996) indicated students with health problem are forced to absenteeism, inattention and dropout. These problems would significantly affect achievement outcomes. For a sick student it would be very hard to attend class room lessons, let alone scoring high and get promotion with great achievement. Thus students in school need services that can curb health problems that hinder student academic performances and psychological wellbeing. Social services that is offered by school social work such as sanitation, a clean water supply, food delivery, settling family and peer encounters, organizing extracurricular activities, etc. contribute to psychosocial wellbeing of students and quality school environments that would in the end create convenient condition for students to improve achievement in academics (Lockheed & Vespoor, 1991). In general school support services are ingredients of the education system that has valuable contribution for quality education.

In Ethiopia provisions of guidance and counseling was introduced in response to the changing needs of the society mainly as a result of the political, economic, and social turmoil of the revolution of 1974. In the meantime, guidance and counseling course was offered in the newly opened Department of Psychology at Addis-Ababa University. Since then graduates of Psychology were assigned as school counselor. However, the graduates were general psychologists' and not professional school counselors.

Although guidance and counseling services have been widely known in secondary and tertiary level educational settings, Ethiopia had no national policy document and guideline for the service (Yirgalem, 2013, and Yusuf, 1998). The saddest reality is that school counselors had been off the track of their professional duty. It was customary to see school counselors engaged in routine administrative works than helping students to be effective in their academics and solve different psychosocial problems they encounter in daily life.

It makes clear that Ethiopian counseling and support services is in bizarre condition. On the one hand there is actually the service in schools - especially in secondary and higher educations; on the other hand it has not been recognized by the education policy of the country. It implies that the service is provided in schools without the recognition of the policy. It indicates that there is clearly observable gap or a missing link between the policy and practice. Accordingly, focusing on the practice of selected secondary schools in Addis Ababa, this policy brief attempted to investigate the extent of the gap between the education policy and the practice of counseling services, and how this gap brought quality education problems in Ethiopia.

2. Examining the Problem

The Ethiopian education policy is designed more importantly to improve quality of education. It is widely believed that poor academic result is the manifestation of poor quality of education. Students' poor academic performance is linked with their mental and physical wellbeing, whether the student has learning ability or disability, parental and social factors, school environment conduciveness, teachers and peers interactions. From this we can understand that students' poor academic performance is not merely students own problem. It could be the outcome of social problems, peer problems, teachers' problems, age related complex emotional problems, etc. All these problems are manageable as long as there is school support and counseling services. The problem here is the policy aimed at achieving quality education undermines school support and counseling services that has a capacity to curb these problems. Counseling and support services are vehicles of quality maintenance. The policy, however, ignored it.

Students' grade promotion, failure as well as matriculation failure in Ethiopia could be associated with lack of policy lead guidance and counseling services. Thus, quality failure is the necessary outcome of policy failure in recognizing guidance and counseling services. The enigma here is that there has been the service, but a policy –less service. Lack of policy - support counseling services brought repercussion to the extent of affecting the quality of the education system of the country. The vivid manifestation of the education quality failure is the report made by the Ministry of education in 2023 about the announcement of the 97% of student failure in matriculation. This is the outcome of the undermining of the counseling services in schools.

And indeed this is big problem that requires scientific examination. And solutions have to be sought that can contribute to the improvement of quality education that the Ethiopian education policy aimed for. Thus, the assessment of policy and practice of school counseling clearly shown the extent of the gap by examining the policy and other legal documents available at the Ministry of education, and the repercussion that the gap has brought on counselors and students as well as on the overall quality of education of the country.

3. Opportunities

The link between school counseling and quality education is strong. Since counseling in schools enable students to overcome the encounters of students, such as academic difficulties (Yulianti-yulianti, et.al, 2024) and the problem of low academic self-efficacy (Ahmad Wahid and Neviyarni ,2024), it contributes for learning difficulties to be manageable so that success in academics, which is one of the aspects of quality education, would become achievable. For a student to be successful academically his/her psychological well-being has to be maintained first and this is possible through guidance and counseling. These and other research findings indicates that quality learning of students as well as the overall effectiveness of educational system is rooted in the service achieved by guidance and counseling. That is a reason that modern educational system has made school counseling services as an integral part of the policies, programs and procedures of educational system (Esuong, Eyo & Joshua, 2007).

Nowadays guidance and counseling services have been provided in conjunction with school support services. To make guidance and counseling services comprehensive and interdisciplinary it has to be supported by school support services. To serve students to the level of their satisfaction and to enable them to achieve quality learning the services offered in schools should be diversified to meet each need of students and this is possible through the coordinated works of guidance and counseling and school support services.

School support services in conjunction with school guidance and counseling services creates the capacity for schools to provide all round services to students. These services together are said to be comprehensive school services. Taken together what we call comprehensive school services or all round student services are four types of basic services: school counseling (guidance and

counseling services), school nursing (school health services), school social work (school social services), and school psychiatry (school psychiatric services). The expected final outcome of these joint services is to make learning effective, i.e. to improve the academic performance of students. For instance, as the works of (Carron & Chau, 1996) indicated students with health problem forced to absenteeism, inattention and dropout. These problems would significantly affect achievement outcomes. For a sick student it would be very hard to attend class room lessons, let alone scoring high and get promotion with great achievement. Thus students in school need services that can curb health problems that hinder student academic performances and psychological wellbeing. Social services that is offered by school social work such as sanitation, a clean water supply, food delivery, settling family and peer encounters, organizing extracurricular activities, etc. contribute to psychosocial wellbeing of students and quality school environments that would in the end create convenient condition for students to improve achievement in academics (Lockheed & Vespoor, 1991). In general school support services are ingredients of the education system that has valuable contribution for quality education.

4. Policy Recommendations

To enhance school support system so as to help students perform better in their academic endeavors and improve quality of education, the following policy recommendations have been made.

Policy Area	Recommendation	Purpose/outcome
Policy Reform	Emphasize school support system in the education policy of the country.	Boost the role of school support system for quality education
School Support Guideline Preparation	Specify job description for school support professionals (guidance and counselors)	Identify roles of professionals; Improve professionals' contribution; Enhance students' overall academic performance
Support for Guidance and	Create supportive mechanisms that enables guidance and counseling	Builds the capacity of the professionals; Provide services

Counselors	professionals to play their roles fully	that fits the need of students
Periodic Supervision	Conduct periodic assessment on schools to understand how effective school support systems are being implemented	Provide additional support; Create awareness among the school community about school support services;
Resource Allocation	Provide supportive resources for the guidance and counseling offices of the schools (resources for special need students, female students, students from low socio-economic background)	Improve the services; Minimize students' additional burdens; Enhance students' academic performance

5. Conclusion

For students to be successful academically and socially, counseling services have to be expanded, augmented and diversified. For effective counseling services to be effective and contribute for quality education, the national education policy should be improved. The improvement of the policy should recognize the provision of school counseling as well as indicating ways of implementations. With the leading role played by the Ministry of Education as the major institution responsible in formulating policies, the collaboration of other stakeholders-schools, guidance and counseling professionals-is critical in ensuring the right focus is given to school support systems in the country.

6. References

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