

The Challenge of Accessibility and Inaccessibility of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools based on Recent Studies: Improving Accessibility

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined recent global studies on the accessibility of guidance and counseling services to provide an understanding on what we know about the nature of accessibility and inaccessibility of guidance and counseling services in schools. The insights from this study are meant to provide some solutions to improve the accessibility of guidance and counseling services in schools to meet the needs of the students in the era of 24/7 with emphasis on client perspective.

Keywords: accessibility to guidance and counseling services, client perspective, school guidance and counseling, student guidance needs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a comprehensive review of current global studies to provide an understanding of what we know about the accessibility of guidance and counseling services. The questions addressed in this study included the accessibility and inaccessibility practices in the provision of guidance and counseling services in schools; how accessibility is understood and practiced; and how to improve accessibility of guidance and counseling services.

II. METHODOLOGY

To find answers to these questions, twenty-two published studies were selected and extensively reviewed. The insights that emerged from these studies were presented using thematic approach and forming the essential findings of this study. The identified and unifying themes were presented one after another and then a synthesis was made, and some recommendations provided.

III. FINDINGS

The following are the findings following the emerging themes of the study. They are: the stigma in seeking help discourage students to seek guidance and counseling services; the well-being of the counselors is important for their accessibility in providing guidance and counseling services; the guidance counselor's workload limits their accessibility in providing guidance and counseling services; the lack of guidance counselors limits the accessibility of guidance and

counseling services; the lack of guidance and counseling resources constraints the accessibility of guidance and counseling services to the students; the students' willingness to seek psychological help is increased by their knowledge of counseling services; cultural beliefs and background encourage or discourage the students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services; religious beliefs influence the students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services; the student's help-seeking behavior impacts their willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services; and guidance counselors actively reaching out to students improves the students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services.

A. *The Stigma in Seeking Help Discourage Students to Seek Guidance and Counseling Services*

The first theme identified is the stigma in seeking help discourage students from seeking guidance and counseling services. According to Kok (2015), among the barriers in seeking counseling services is students are discouraged by the stigma in terms of "what would happen to them if they sought counselling services-feeling ashamed, embarrassed, fearful and anxious" (Section Discussion, para. 2). The stigma, self-stigma and public stigma, generates "strong negative emotions (shame, fear) about seeking counselling services" (Section Discussion, para. 4). Seeking counseling help imply severe psychological problems, being associated with mental disorder, extreme fear of being made fun of and embarrassed by friends, which leads to a person being stigmatized by the public (Auger *et al.*, 2018; Kok, 2015; Muhorakeye, 2021; Namoonde, 2017; Sullivan & Mancillas, 2015).

Beebe (2017) observed that when students are more knowledgeable about psychology, there is less stigma

pressure in seeking help.

Accessibility of guidance and counseling services is constrained by the stigmatization in seeking help.

The lack of knowledge about the guidance and counseling services limits the students' willingness to seek psychological help.

B. The Second Theme Identified Is the Lack of Knowledge about the Guidance and Counseling Services Limits the Students' Willingness to Seek Psychological Help

Namoonde (2017, p. 42), found that "learners' awareness of the guidance and counselling services provided in school affected learners' access to the service." The lack of knowledge about where to go and how to make an appointment with the school counselor are among the barriers in accessing guidance and counseling services (Beebe, 2017).

Kambouropoulos (2015), concluded that if the universities are not able to effectively communicate the process of the guidance and counseling services to the students, it becomes a barrier to counseling.

Considering the above findings, it is evident that accessibility of guidance and counseling services can be limited by the students' lack of knowledge about the guidance and counseling services.

The lack of guidance counselors limits the accessibility of guidance and counseling services

C. The Third Theme Is the Lack of Guidance Counselors Limits the Accessibility of Guidance and Counseling Services

Warui (2018), found that the number of trained counselors available to provide guidance and counseling services is inadequate to provide student services and implement a full range of guidance and counseling programs. In another study, Marshall (2019), concluded that the lack of guidance counselors limit student accessibility to services such as early interventions and treatment which are "critical to supporting students' social and emotional needs," (para. 4).

According to ASCA (2019), School counselors matter in preparing students for postsecondary success by meeting their individual needs. The lack of guidance counselors makes it "difficult to do that meaningfully if school counselors are responsible for supporting unmanageable numbers of students" (ASCA, 2019, para. 9). The insufficient number of licensed counselors to provide services to potential clients is one of the reasons why guidance and counseling services remain inaccessible to students (Botor, 2015; Magsambol & Chi, 2020; Valdez, 2017).

Based on the above presented studies, it is clear that access to guidance services is very much limited by the lack of guidance counselors.

The guidance counselor's workload limits their accessibility in providing guidance and counseling services.

D. The Fourth Theme Is the Guidance Counselor's Workload Limits Their Accessibility in Providing Guidance and Counseling Services

Warui (2018) and Boitt (2016), found that guidance counselors have heavy academic workload which take away time from providing guidance and counseling services. This practice limit student access to guidance and counseling services because it leaves counselors "little time to dedicate

to provision of guidance and counselling services and this compromises the quality of the counselling services" (Boitt, 2016, p. 31). More than just limiting access, this has also a huge negative impact on the performance of counselors and quality of services provided (Sari & Suardiman, 2022).

As seen above, the heavy workload of the counselors restricts the accessibility of the guidance and counseling services.

The well-being of the counselors is important for their accessibility in providing guidance and counseling services.

E. The Fifth Theme Identified Is the Well-Being of the Counselors Is Important for Their Accessibility in Providing Guidance and Counseling Services

The psychological well-being of the counselor helps in building relationships with the clients which helps in reducing anxiety and stress (Ismail *et al.*, 2017). Well-being in Purwaningrum *et al.* (2019), is described as being able to perform guidance and counseling services without being hampered by them. In the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), counselors are required to ensure that their impairment does not interfere with their rendering of services to their clients. The provision states that counselors must "monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired" (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014, p. 9).

Therefore, as shown above, counselors' well-being is important to guarantee quality accessibility in providing guidance and counseling services to the students.

Cultural beliefs and background encourage or discourage the students' willingness to seek guidance and counseling services.

F. The Sixth Theme Is the Cultural Beliefs and Background Encourage or Discourage the Students' Willingness in Seeking Guidance and Counseling Services

Kambouropoulos (2015) noted that many students believe that counselors from different cultural backgrounds have different approaches to handling their issues. For some students, seeking help from a guidance counselor to resolve their issues is not part of their culture (Kambouropoulos, 2015). In Namoonde (2017), students were reported claiming that culture hampered their access to guidance and counseling services. They resisted to seek help, share their secrets and issues considered as taboo with a guidance counselor because culturally, they did not trust them, and they considered them strangers (Namoonde, 2017).

With the above evidence, students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services seem to be encouraged or discouraged by their cultural beliefs and background.

Religious beliefs influence the students' willingness to seek guidance and counseling services.

G. The Seventh Theme Is Religious Beliefs Influence the Students' Willingness in Seeking Guidance and Counseling Services

According to Estrada *et al.* (2019), students tend to hold on to their religious beliefs which can restrict them from seeking professional help. In another study, Rogers-Sirin *et al.* (2017), concluded that hierarchical family values contribute to the negative relationship between religion and attitude

towards seeking psychological services. For example, Muslim Turks would prefer religious services than psychotherapy (Rogers-Sirin *et al.*, 2017).

Based on the above, it is very likely that students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services is influenced by their religious beliefs.

The student's help-seeking behavior impacts their willingness to seek guidance and counseling services.

H. The Eighth Theme Is the Student's Help-Seeking Behavior Impacts Their Willingness in Seeking Guidance and Counseling Services

Kambouropoulos (2015), found that students' help-seeking behavior impact their willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services. For example, some students prefer to seek help from friends and those they are most comfortable with, which they see as the most natural and acceptable thing to do instead of seeking help from a guidance counselor (Kambouropoulos, 2015).

Another example of help-seeking behavior is that students tend to seek guidance and counseling services only when they are already in deep crisis, that is when they think that their problems are severe and worse (Broglia *et al.*, 2021; Kambouropoulos, 2015; Kok, 2015). Examples of such situations are serious family problems and mental health issues (Auger *et al.*, 2018, Section Results para. 13). In a similar manner, Auger *et al.* (2018), found that when students are faced with safety concerns such as bullying, suicide, abuse, etc., they seek counseling as their last resort.

In relation to the above evidence, it seems clear that students' help-seeking behavior can be a barrier or enabler to their willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services.

Guidance counselors actively reaching out to students improves the students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services.

I. The Ninth Theme Is Guidance Counselors Actively Reaching Out to Students Improves the Students' Willingness in Seeking Guidance and Counseling Services

Auger *et al.* (2019) found that students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services improves when guidance counselors actively reach out to them. Actively reaching out to students includes such behaviors as guidance counselors meeting the students in class, socializing with them, and conducting one-on-one sessions with them (Auger *et al.*, 2019).

Based on the above, it seems likely that guidance counselors actively reaching out to students can have improved willingness in students to seek the guidance and counseling services.

IV. SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing presentation highlights what constitutes the accessibility and inaccessibility of guidance and counseling services based on global and local literature and studies. Clearly, it can be concluded that accessibility and inaccessibility is a complex phenomenon that may imply different realities depending on the context. We have learned that: stigma discourage students from seeking help; the well-

being of the counselors is critical to the accessibility and effective delivery of guidance services; the heavy workload of the guidance counselors limits their accessibility in providing services; the lack of guidance counselors limits accessibility of guidance services to students; having knowledge about the guidance and counseling services increases the students' willingness to seek appropriate guidance and counseling services; students' different cultural beliefs and backgrounds easily become a form of inaccessibility to guidance and counseling services; the students' religious beliefs hamper the students' willingness to seek guidance and counseling services; the students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services depends on their help-seeking behavior; the students are willing to seek guidance and counseling services if the guidance counselors are actively reaching out to them.

V. INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights from this study, the following recommendations are made which may be helpful in improving the accessibility of guidance and counseling services to students in schools.

- 1) To increase the accessibility of the guidance and counseling services, elements of stigma that may discourage students from seeking help should be effectively managed.
- 2) To increase the accessibility of the guidance and counseling services, focus on the well-being of the counselors must be prioritized because it is the key to providing effective guidance and counseling services to the students.
- 3) The workload of the guidance counselors should not be heavy to ensure that they are constantly available for clients at their own convenient time.
- 4) Given the shortage of licensed guidance counselors, accessibility can be increased by way of outsourcing professional guidance and counseling services to fill the gaps.
- 5) To increase the accessibility of guidance and counseling services, continuous effective dissemination of information about guidance and counseling services must be undertaken to increase students' willingness in seeking guidance and counseling services.
- 6) To improve the accessibility of guidance and counseling services, schools have to incorporate cultural competence into the guidance and counseling services to overcome the cultural dynamics gap between guidance personnel as well as services provided and students.
- 7) To increase the accessibility of guidance and counseling services, schools must provide programs that will actively encourage students to seek the guidance and counseling services.

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