



Beyond Access: How Guidance and Counselling Services Influence Students' Personal Growth, Academic Success and Career Readiness in Secondary Schools in Vihiga County, Kenya

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Abstract: *Guidance and counselling services are important components of holistic education, yet limited evidence exists on their influence beyond accessibility. This study examined how guidance and counselling services influence students' personal growth, academic success, and career readiness in secondary schools in Vihiga County, Kenya. A descriptive correlational research design was adopted. The study involved 287 Form Three students and 5 teacher-counsellors from five secondary schools. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation checklists. Reliability was established through a pilot study, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.983. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings showed that students generally perceived guidance and counselling services as accessible ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.76$). The services positively influenced personal growth ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.74$), while career readiness recorded the highest effectiveness rating ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.72$). Academic success recorded the lowest effectiveness rating ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.83$). Pearson correlation analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between perceived accessibility and effectiveness ($r = -0.091$, $p = .123$). The study concludes that guidance and counselling services contribute meaningfully to students' personal growth and career readiness but are less effective in promoting academic success. The findings suggest that programme effectiveness depends on factors beyond accessibility. The study recommends strengthening counsellor training, improving resources, enhancing awareness, and expanding academic and career support interventions.*

Keywords: *guidance and counselling, personal growth, academic success, career readiness, effectiveness, secondary schools, Vihiga County.*

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1. Introduction

Guidance and counselling programs play a critical role in shaping students' development by helping them navigate academic, personal and career-related challenges within the school environment. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2019), the core objective of school-based counselling is to promote

learners' overall well-being through structured support systems that address academic guidance, personal growth and career readiness. In moving beyond access, contemporary education systems have increasingly shifted from reactive and remedial counselling approaches toward more comprehensive and developmental models that support learners' holistic development (Department for Education, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). These evolving frameworks aim not

only to make services available but to ensure that students meaningfully benefit through improved self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal competence and informed decision-making.

UNESCO (2021) distinguishes guidance from counselling by explaining that guidance is a preventive and developmental process that helps students make informed academic, career and personal decisions through structured support, while counselling is more individualized and remedial, focusing on emotional, psychological or behavioral challenges. However, beyond access, the effectiveness of these services depends on the extent to which they are meaningfully integrated into learners' daily experiences. Wambu and Fisher (2015) further emphasize this distinction by describing guidance as a broad school-wide function that builds life skills, while counselling provides deeper, confidential intervention. In this sense, beyond access shifts attention from availability of services to their depth, relevance and impact on learners' lived realities.

The influence of guidance and counselling on personal growth is particularly significant during adolescence, a stage characterized by identity formation, emotional instability and social adjustment challenges. Hays (2020) observes that many young people experience confusion, fear and alienation as they navigate complex social expectations. In such contexts, counselling provides a safe space for emotional expression and coping skill development. Yet beyond access, what matters most is whether these interventions translate into sustained emotional resilience and self-efficacy. Evidence by Eliamani, Mghweno, and Baguma (2014) indicates that when counselling programs are effectively implemented, students report increased confidence, safety and personal stability, highlighting that meaningful outcomes depend on quality of engagement rather than mere availability of services.

In the academic domain, counselling supports learners through structured academic planning, subject selection, goal setting, and study skill development. Research shows that personalized academic guidance is associated with improved engagement and academic performance (Foon, Zainudin, & Othman, 2020). However, beyond access, the real value of academic counselling lies in its ability to translate guidance into measurable improvements in study habits, motivation and performance outcomes. School counsellors often use assessment tools and individualized strategies to align students' strengths with educational pathways, ensuring that academic support is not only provided but effectively utilized to enhance learner achievement.

Career counselling has become increasingly important due to the complexity of the modern labour market shaped by technological and economic change. Akçabozan-Kayabol et al. (2021) note that effective career guidance helps students understand career options, labour market trends and personal strengths. Through

mentorship programs and experiential learning, learners gain exposure to potential career pathways. However, beyond access, career counselling must move beyond awareness creation to actual career readiness, where learners are equipped to make informed, realistic and confident career decisions. In Kenya, despite early initiatives such as career wheels, recent evidence highlights the need for more structured and technology-enhanced approaches to strengthen decision-making and preparedness (Oduor, 2023).

Globally, guidance and counselling systems have increasingly adopted holistic frameworks that integrate academic, personal and career development. The ASCA National Model (2019) in the United States, the Department for Education (2021) framework in the United Kingdom and expanded counselling systems in China (Wang, 2020) all reflect a shared recognition that effective student support systems must go beyond access to ensure meaningful developmental outcomes. Similarly, France and Germany have institutionalized counselling through structured vocational and psychological support systems, reinforcing the idea that access alone is insufficient without quality, consistency and integration (Eurydice, 2023; Euroguidance Network, 2022).

In Africa, countries such as Nigeria have progressively integrated guidance and counselling into education systems since the late 1950s. Although the focus initially emphasized vocational development, it has expanded to psychosocial and academic support. However, beyond access, challenges such as inadequate training and limited infrastructure continue to undermine effectiveness (Ogunyemi & Lagunju, 2020). In Kenya, guidance and counselling was formally introduced following the Gachathi Report (1976) and strengthened through the Ministry of Education Policy Framework (2023). Despite these policy advances, gaps persist, particularly where counselling is delivered by untrained teachers, limiting its developmental impact on learners (Irungu, 2019; Kavuthai, Maithya & Kimani, 2024).

In Vihiga County, structural and implementation challenges further illustrate the gap between provision and impact. While approximately 67% of secondary schools have counselling departments, fewer than half have adequately equipped counselling spaces (Mudulia, Ayiro, & Kipsoi, 2017). Beyond access, these limitations affect the quality and consistency of service delivery, which is reflected in moderate completion rates and weak alignment between learners' career aspirations and subject choices. This suggests that counselling services may be present in schools but are not sufficiently transformative in shaping learner outcomes.

It is within this context that this study examines how guidance and counselling services operate beyond access, focusing on their actual influence on students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness in secondary schools in Vihiga County, Kenya. The study

therefore shifts attention from mere availability of services to the extent of their effectiveness and impact on holistic learner development.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although guidance and counselling services are formally recognized as essential components of holistic education in Kenya, a persistent gap exists between policy expectations and their practical implementation in secondary schools. National education policy emphasizes counselling as a key mechanism for enhancing students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness (Ministry of Education, 2023). However, evidence from school contexts indicates that these programs are often characterized by inadequate structure, limited resources and inconsistent delivery. This raises a critical concern regarding whether guidance and counselling services are functioning only at the level of availability and access or whether they are delivering meaningful outcomes beyond access in terms of learner development.

Empirical literature consistently demonstrates that effective counselling contributes to improved self-confidence, motivation, school engagement and decision-making among students (Kavuthai, Maithya, & Kimani, 2024; Oduor, 2023; Ngeno, 2022). Despite these documented benefits, many public secondary schools continue to experience significant implementation challenges, including shortages of trained counsellors, insufficient time allocation, inadequate facilities and negative student perceptions that associate counselling with disciplinary processes rather than developmental support (Wambu & Fisher, 2015; Irungu, 2019). Consequently, even where counselling services are present, their capacity to influence students' personal, academic and career development remains uncertain, particularly in terms of outcomes beyond access.

In Vihiga County, these concerns are more pronounced. Reports indicate high rates of teenage pregnancy and school dropout, challenges that are widely recognized as preventable through effective guidance and counselling interventions (KNBS, 2023). Further, a 2023 County Education Office report reveals that only about one-third of public secondary schools have trained counsellors, with the majority relying on teacher-counsellors who often lack professional preparation and are burdened with additional teaching responsibilities. This situation suggests that counselling services may exist structurally within schools, yet their effectiveness in supporting meaningful student development beyond access remains limited.

Although prior studies have examined the influence of guidance and counselling on isolated outcomes such as academic achievement (Odhiambo, 2014) and career decision-making (Racho et al., 2014), limited attention has been given to their combined influence on personal growth, academic success and career readiness.

Moreover, much of the existing evidence predates the post-COVID-19 educational context, which is marked by heightened emotional distress, increased learner disengagement and growing uncertainty in career pathways. This creates a need to better understand how counselling services operate in contemporary school settings not merely in terms of availability, but in terms of effectiveness and impact beyond access.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To explore Beyond Access: How guidance and counselling services influence students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness in secondary schools in Vihiga County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Guidance and Counselling in Schools

Guidance and counselling in schools is widely recognized as a structured developmental process that supports learners in understanding themselves and making informed decisions regarding academic, personal and career matters. According to American School Counselor Association (2019), school counselling aims to promote the holistic development of learners through systematic interventions that address academic achievement, emotional wellbeing and career planning.

UNESCO (2021) distinguishes guidance from counselling by noting that guidance is preventive and informational, helping students make informed choices, while counselling is more individualized and therapeutic, addressing specific emotional or behavioural challenges. Wambu and Fisher (2015) further explain that guidance is school-wide and developmental, while counselling is more personal and problem-focused. Together, these functions ensure that learners receive structured support that extends beyond access to schooling, moving into meaningful engagement that strengthens their overall educational experience and life preparedness. In this sense, guidance and counselling are increasingly viewed not merely as supplementary school services but as essential mechanisms that shape how learners experience education, respond to challenges and plan their futures.

2.2 Accessibility of Guidance and Counselling Services in Schools

Accessibility of guidance and counselling services is essential in determining whether learners meaningfully benefit from school support systems. Accessibility includes the availability of trained counsellors, adequate counselling spaces, confidentiality and the ease with which students can seek support. Abdullah and Marimuthu (2017) note that professionally trained counsellors improve the quality and relevance of

counselling services, while Mugalu and Oundo (2019) emphasize that accessible counselling supports students' personal, academic and career development from an early stage.

In Kenya, although many secondary schools have designated teacher-counsellors, most lack specialized counselling training and often combine counselling with teaching responsibilities (Chege, 2018; Otieno & Wambugu, 2020). As a result, counselling services are frequently limited, reactive and associated with discipline rather than student development (Wambu & Wickman, 2016). Ndambuki (2021) further observes that inadequate professional preparation reduces the effectiveness of counselling, particularly in addressing learners' personal, academic and career needs.

These challenges suggest that student development depends not only on the availability of counselling services but also on the quality, consistency and effectiveness of support provided. Effective guidance and counselling therefore extends beyond access by ensuring that learners receive meaningful interventions that enhance personal growth, academic success and career readiness.

2.3 Guidance and Counselling and Personal Growth

Personal growth among students is strongly influenced by the availability of effective guidance and counselling services. During adolescence, learners often face emotional, psychological and social challenges related to identity formation, peer pressure and self-esteem. Hays (2020) observes that many young people experience emotional confusion and social alienation, which can negatively affect their development if not addressed in a supportive environment.

Guidance and counselling provide such a supportive environment where learners can express themselves, build coping strategies and develop emotional resilience. Eliamani, Mghweno and Baguma (2014) found that students exposed to structured counselling programs report improved confidence, emotional stability and a stronger sense of safety within school environments. This reflects a form of school experience that goes beyond access to classrooms and instruction, extending into emotional support systems that shape how learners perceive themselves and others.

Similarly, Njagi and Gichure (2021) emphasize that psychological wellbeing is closely linked to students' ability to manage stress and interpersonal relationships effectively. Nkechi (2016) further argues that counselling goes beyond academic support by fostering self-awareness, empathy and responsible decision-making. In this way, guidance and counselling contributes significantly to personal growth by helping learners develop life skills that extend beyond classroom

learning and into everyday social interactions and future adulthood responsibilities.

2.4 Guidance and Counselling and Academic Success

Academic success is not solely determined by access to education but also by the availability of structured academic support systems such as guidance and counselling. Foon, Zainudin & Othman (2020) note that academic counselling improves students' performance by helping them set academic goals, develop study skills and maintain motivation.

Counsellors assist learners in time management, subject selection and overcoming learning difficulties. Chege (2018) explains that counselling services help identify learners who are struggling academically and provide appropriate interventions to improve performance. Ndambuki (2021) adds that effective counselling enhances classroom participation and academic engagement, leading to improved learning outcomes.

In many educational settings, especially where counselling structures are inconsistent, students may have access to schooling but lack adequate academic guidance to fully benefit from it. Where counselling is effectively implemented, learners demonstrate improved discipline, higher motivation and better academic achievement, highlighting its importance in shaping educational outcomes. This reinforces the idea that meaningful academic success depends not only on enrolment but on the depth of support systems available within schools.

2.5 Guidance and Counselling and Career Readiness

Career readiness is a critical outcome of effective guidance and counselling services. Akçabozan-Kayabol et al. (2021) explain that modern career counselling helps students align their interests, strengths and abilities with labour market demands. This enables learners to make realistic and informed career decisions.

Pordelan and Hosseinian (2022) emphasize that the use of digital tools and interactive counselling methods enhances students' awareness of career options and improves decision-making. This shift reflects a growing global recognition that career development requires more than exposure it requires structured, continuous engagement that moves learners beyond basic access to information toward actionable career planning.

In Kenya, however, career guidance remains underdeveloped, with many schools relying on traditional tools such as career charts and teacher-led advice sessions (Oduor, 2023). Ng'ang'a and Wambui (2017) observe that limited exposure to structured career guidance leaves many students uncertain about their future pathways after secondary education. Effective

career counselling, on the other hand, includes mentorship, internships and exposure to labour market trends, all of which are essential for developing career readiness among learners.

2.6 Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Schools

Guidance and counselling services play an important role in promoting students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness. Studies from different countries show that effective counselling programs contribute to learners' emotional wellbeing, academic motivation and future planning. In Malaysia, for example, counselling services are structured to support students beyond disciplinary concerns by addressing emotional, social and developmental needs. Abdullah and Marimuthu (2017) found that professionally trained counsellors help learners cope with challenges such as family conflict, stress and substance abuse, thereby improving their personal wellbeing and resilience.

The contribution of counselling to academic success has also been widely documented. In Nigeria, guidance and counselling services were associated with improved academic performance and reduced dropout rates among female students by addressing emotional and psychological barriers to learning (Adegoke & Adeyemo, 2018). Similarly, Sharma and Verma (2017) reported that counselling services in India enhanced students' self-esteem, academic engagement and overall school participation. These findings suggest that academic achievement is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by the availability of supportive counselling structures that help learners remain focused and motivated.

Guidance and counselling further contributes to career readiness by helping students understand their abilities, interests and future opportunities. Abdullah and Marimuthu (2017) note that career counselling assists learners in selecting educational pathways that align with their strengths and aspirations. In Kenya, Nyaga et al. (2014) observed that students exposed to structured counselling programs demonstrated improved academic growth and clearer career direction. Similarly, Irungu (2019) found that counselling positively influenced academic goal setting and learning outcomes among secondary school students in Lamu West Sub-County.

Despite these benefits, the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in Kenya continues to face significant challenges. Wambu and Fisher (2015) note that many teacher-counsellors perform dual roles without professional counselling training, limiting the quality of support offered to learners. Inadequate resources, limited institutional support and lack of standardized counselling frameworks further weaken program effectiveness. Mwangi (2018) therefore recommends continuous teacher training and stronger policy support to enhance the role of guidance and counselling in promoting

students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive correlational research design to examine how guidance and counselling services influence students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness in secondary schools in Vihiga County, Kenya. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to describe students' experiences and perceptions regarding guidance and counselling services as they naturally occur in schools without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted in Vihiga County, which has 115 public and private secondary schools with an estimated student population of 21,000 learners. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select participating schools and respondents. Schools were stratified by sub-county and school type to ensure representation across the county. Five secondary schools were selected and one guidance and counselling teacher from each school was purposively included due to their direct involvement in counselling services. Cluster sampling was then used to select one Form Three stream in each school, resulting in 287 student respondents and 5 teacher-counsellors, giving a total sample size of 292 participants.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists to obtain comprehensive information on the influence of guidance and counselling services on students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness. Questionnaires were administered to the 287 Form Three students to gather data on students' perceptions of counselling accessibility, effectiveness and developmental outcomes using Likert-scale items. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 5 guidance and counselling teachers to provide contextual insights into counselling practices and implementation challenges within schools. Observation checklists were used to document the availability and condition of counselling facilities, counselling materials and related support structures in the selected schools. Validity of the instruments was ensured through expert review and alignment with the study objectives and variables, while reliability was established through a pilot study conducted in secondary schools in Kakamega County. The questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.983, indicating excellent internal consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, t-tests, ANOVA and Pearson correlation, while qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically to enrich interpretation of the findings. Ethical considerations were observed through informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and secure handling of research data throughout the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Perceptions of Students on Accessibility of Guidance and Counselling Services

Mean Range Interpretation	
3.50 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50 – 3.49	Agree
1.50 – 2.49	Disagree
1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree

Table 1: Perceptions of Students on Accessibility of Guidance and Counselling Services

	Descriptive Statistics	
	N	Std. Mean Deviation
The physical location of the counselling office is easy to access.	2873.41	.703
All students at my school, including those with special needs, have access to guidance and counselling services.	2873.31	.752
There are multiple ways to access guidance and counselling, including in-person and mentorship programs.	2873.12	.861
Guidance and counselling services are confidential and private.	2873.11	.706
The counsellor's mode of delivery is effective and clear.	2873.11	.766
I am aware of the guidance and counselling services available at my school.	2873.03	.856
Overall	3.18	.763

Table 1 shows that students generally perceived guidance and counselling services as accessible in their schools, with an overall mean score of 3.18 (SD = 0.76), interpreted as Agree. The highest-rated item was the ease of accessing the counselling office (M = 3.41, SD = 0.70), indicating that most students found the counselling facilities physically accessible. Students also agreed that guidance and counselling services were accessible to all learners, including those with special needs (M = 3.31, SD = 0.75). These findings suggest that schools have made efforts to ensure that counselling services extend beyond basic availability to support diverse learner needs.

Students further agreed that counselling services could be accessed through different approaches such as mentorship programs and teacher support systems (M = 3.12, SD = 0.86). Similarly, confidentiality of counselling services and effectiveness of counsellors' delivery were both positively rated (M = 3.11). However, awareness of available guidance and counselling services recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.03, SD = 0.86), implying that although services were available, some students were not fully informed about them. The relatively high standard deviations on awareness and multiple delivery methods indicate variations in experiences across schools, suggesting inconsistencies in communication, visibility and implementation of counselling programs.

The findings demonstrate that accessibility of guidance and counselling services involves more than physical presence within schools. Effective accessibility also depends on awareness, confidentiality, flexibility and the quality of student engagement. These findings are consistent with Wambu and Fisher (2015), who argue that counselling programs are more effective when learners can easily identify and utilize the available support structures. Similarly, Chege (2018) observed that inadequate communication and limited visibility of counselling services often reduce students' utilization of school counselling programs.

Observational findings further supported the survey responses. Some schools had dedicated counselling rooms, visible counselling materials and flexible counselling schedules, creating supportive environments for learners. However, other schools lacked private counselling spaces and adequate counselling resources, particularly materials related to mental health and career guidance. Responses from open-ended items also revealed concerns about confidentiality and limited time for counselling due to academic schedules. These findings suggest that improving accessibility requires schools to strengthen communication, privacy, scheduling flexibility and counselling resources to enhance students' personal growth, academic success and career readiness.

4.2 Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Academic Success, Personal Growth and Career Readiness

Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Personal Growth

Mean Range Interpretation

3.50 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50 – 3.49	Agree
1.50 – 2.49	Disagree
1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree

Table 2: Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Personal Growth

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have developed better interpersonal relationships through guidance programs.	2873	3.39	.729
I feel more valued and included in school because of the counseling programs.	2873	3.38	.728
I am able to express my thoughts clearly after receiving counseling support.	2873	3.36	.675
I can handle personal challenges more effectively with the advice I receive.	2873	3.27	.735
I participate more actively in group activities because of the support from the counselor.	2873	3.07	.681
I am more aware of how to respect and support others due to guidance services.	2873	3.04	.711
I manage stress better after discussing issues with the school counselor.	2872	2.75	.828
I feel more confident managing conflicts with peers due to guidance services.	2872	2.74	.737
Overall		3.13	.746

From Table 2, the results showed that students generally agreed that guidance and counselling programs had a positive impact on their personal growth, with an overall mean score of 3.13 (SD = 0.74) on a 4-point Likert scale. This suggests that, on average, students positively perceive the role of counselling in shaping their personal attitudes, behaviors, and coping abilities. The highest-rated statement was “I have developed better interpersonal relationships through guidance programs”, with a mean of 3.39 (SD = 0.73). This indicates that a majority of students credit counselling programs with improving their interpersonal skills, a vital component of social and emotional development. Similarly, “I feel more valued and included in school because of the counseling programs” recorded a high agreement level at 3.38 (SD = 0.73), showing that counselling programs also enhance students' sense of belonging and emotional inclusion within the school community.

Further, students agreed with the statement “I am able to express my thoughts clearly after receiving counseling support” (M = 3.36, SD = 0.68), reflecting counselling's effectiveness in fostering self-expression. “I can handle personal challenges more effectively with the advice I receive” also had a notable agreement at 3.27 (SD = 0.74), indicating that many students gain resilience through these programs.

Moderate agreement was reported for “I participate more actively in group activities because of the support from

the counselor” (M = 3.07, SD = 0.68) and “I am more aware of how to respect and support others due to guidance services” (M = 3.04, SD = 0.71). These findings suggest that counselling has been moderately effective in enhancing group dynamics and prosocial behaviors, though possibly dependent on how these aspects are emphasized across different schools.

Lower mean values were recorded for “I manage stress better after discussing issues with the school counselor” (M = 2.75, SD = 0.83) and “I feel more confident managing conflicts with peers due to guidance services” (M = 2.74, SD = 0.74). While still within the “Agree” range, these results indicate areas where guidance programs may need to be strengthened, especially in developing students' conflict resolution and stress management abilities. The relatively higher standard deviations here also reflect greater variability in students' experiences, suggesting inconsistency in how effectively these services are delivered.

The findings suggest that guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Vihiga County are perceived as beneficial to students' personal growth, particularly in improving interpersonal relationships, self-expression and emotional inclusion. These findings align with earlier research indicating that school counselling promotes social and emotional development by improving interpersonal skills, self-expression and resilience among students (Chege & Karanja, 2019;

Mbiti, 2016). Programs that actively foster peer support, self-awareness and emotional inclusion have been shown to enhance students' personal growth, while limited emphasis on stress and conflict management can reduce overall effectiveness.

The open-ended responses revealed consistent themes regarding the personal benefits of guidance programs. Students reported that one-on-one counselling helped them navigate peer pressure, resolve personal issues and build self-confidence. Others highlighted that group sessions or mentorship programs improved their communication skills and ability to participate in collaborative activities. However, some students indicated that support for managing stress and resolving

conflicts with peers was insufficient, corroborating the quantitative finding of lower mean scores in these areas.

4.3 Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Academic Success

Mean Range Interpretation

3.50 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50 – 3.49	Agree
1.50 – 2.49	Disagree
1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree

Table 3: Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Academic Success

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am more focused during classes due to the support I receive.	2873	3.43	.680
Counseling has motivated me to improve my school attendance.	2873	2.28	.823
Guidance services have helped me identify and overcome learning challenges.	2873	3.09	.755
I feel prepared for exams after discussing my study plans with the counselor.	2873	3.03	.721
I study more effectively after guidance on learning strategies.	2872	2.82	.762
I better understand how to set academic goals through counseling.	2872	2.74	.918
I have improved my grades since attending counseling sessions.	2872	2.61	.798
The advice from counselors helps me manage my time well.	2872	2.57	.950
Overall	2872	2.95	.831

From Table 3, the results showed that students generally agreed that counselling had a positive impact on their academic lives, with an overall mean score of 2.95 (SD = 0.83). Although the mean falls within the "Agree" category (2.50–3.49), it is on the lower side, suggesting room for improvement in the academic support domain.

The most highly rated item was "I am more focused during classes due to the support I receive", which received a mean of 3.43 (SD = 0.68). This suggests that students recognize a strong link between counselling services and their concentration in class, a foundational component of academic achievement. Following this, "Counseling has motivated me to improve my school attendance" was rated at 3.28 (SD = 0.82), indicating that counselling plays a motivating role in helping students remain consistent in their school participation.

Students also moderately agreed that "Guidance services have helped me identify and overcome learning challenges" (M = 3.09, SD = 0.76) and "I feel prepared for exams after discussing my study plans with the counselor" (M = 3.03, SD = 0.72). These findings suggest that counselling has a notable role in exam readiness and addressing academic difficulties, though the standard deviations reflect moderate variability in student experiences.

Lower scores were reported for the statements "I study more effectively after guidance on learning strategies" (M = 2.82, SD = 0.76) and "I better understand how to set academic goals through counseling" (M = 2.74, SD = 0.92), indicating that some students may not be receiving sufficient strategic academic planning support through counselling. Even lower agreement was observed for "I

have improved my grades since attending counseling sessions” (M = 2.61, SD = 0.80) and “The advice from counselors helps me manage my time well” (M = 2.57, SD = 0.95). These items reflect important gaps in the application or effectiveness of counselling in influencing direct academic performance outcomes such as grades and time management. The relatively wider standard deviations, especially for the items on goal setting and time management, indicate a greater disparity in student experiences, suggesting inconsistencies in how counselling is implemented or received across schools in the county.

The findings imply that students perceive guidance and counselling services as moderately effective in promoting academic success, particularly in improving focus and attendance. However, the comparatively lower scores in strategic academic skills like time management, grade improvement and study habits highlight areas where counselling services need enhancement. Strengthening academic interventions within counselling programs could lead to more consistent academic outcomes for students.

These findings align with previous research indicating that school counselling can enhance student focus, attendance and engagement but is often less effective in systematically improving grades, time management, and academic planning when resources or structured programs are limited (Mbiti, 2016). Studies emphasize

the need for targeted interventions such as structured study skills workshops, individualized learning plans and goal-setting guidance to translate counselling support into measurable academic outcomes.

Qualitative data from open ended responses reinforced these findings. Students reported that guidance sessions helped them concentrate better in class, stay motivated, and clarify areas of academic difficulty. Some described instances where individual counselling enabled them to overcome learning challenges, such as managing coursework or preparing for exams. Conversely, several students highlighted gaps in structured academic support, mentioning limited guidance on effective study strategies, time management and goal-setting, which sometimes left them struggling to translate counselling into improved grades.

4.4 Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Career Readiness

Mean Range Interpretation

3.50 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50 – 3.49	Agree
1.50 – 2.49	Disagree
1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree

Table 4: Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services in Enhancing Career Readiness

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The school counseling services provide valuable information about job opportunities.	2873	.46	.624
I know how to search for relevant courses and future opportunities.	2873	.45	.634
I know how to match my subjects to my career goals because of guidance.	2873	.43	.660
I have a clear career path in mind due to the guidance provided.	2873	.23	.718
I feel prepared to make career decisions after speaking with a counselor.	2873	.10	.748
Counseling sessions have helped me understand my career options.	2873	.06	.830
Counselors help me understand the skills needed for my desired career.	2873	.01	.719
I can create a basic career plan thanks to counseling support.	2872	.94	.687
Overall		3.21	.723

Table 4 presents findings related to the perceived effectiveness of guidance and counselling in preparing students for career choices. Overall, students reported a positive experience in this domain, with a composite mean of 3.21 (SD = 0.72), indicating general agreement that counselling services contribute meaningfully to their career readiness.

The most positively rated statement was “The school counseling services provide valuable information about job opportunities” (M = 3.46, SD = 0.62), suggesting that students view counsellors as useful sources of real-world vocational knowledge. Closely aligned with this was “I know how to search for relevant courses and future opportunities” (M = 3.45, SD = 0.63) and “I know how to match my subjects to my career goals because of guidance” (M = 3.43, SD = 0.66), which show that

students generally feel well-supported in aligning their academic pursuits with career ambitions.

Moderate agreement was recorded for “I have a clear career path in mind due to the guidance provided” (M = 3.23, SD = 0.72) and “I feel prepared to make career decisions after speaking with a counselor” (M = 3.10, SD = 0.75). These scores reflect growing confidence among students regarding future planning, though not all students may be equally confident in finalizing their decisions.

Other responses such as “Counseling sessions have helped me understand my career options” (M = 3.06, SD = 0.83) and “Counselors help me understand the skills needed for my desired career” (M = 3.01, SD = 0.72) show agreement but also indicate variability in impact, as suggested by their slightly lower means and wider standard deviations. The item with the lowest mean in this domain was “I can create a basic career plan thanks to counseling support” (M = 2.94, SD = 0.69), although still within the "Agree" interpretation band. This may reflect the need for more structured or practical planning tools to help students develop actionable career roadmaps.

The findings suggest that students perceive the counselling services in their schools as moderately effective in enhancing career readiness, particularly in areas related to career awareness, subject-career alignment and access to information about job opportunities. However, more targeted support may be needed to help students translate this awareness into concrete planning and confident decision-making. These findings align with previous research indicating that school guidance services are particularly effective in raising career awareness, linking academic subjects to career goals, and providing information on educational pathways and job opportunities (Chege & Karanja, 2019; Okoth & Kiplagat, 2018). However, studies also indicate that practical tools for career planning, skill development

and decision-making are often less developed, which can limit the translation of awareness into actionable career readiness.

Open-ended responses reinforced these results. Students frequently mentioned that career guidance sessions, mentorship programs and career fairs helped them identify potential career paths, understand subject relevance and learn about job opportunities. Several students, however, noted gaps in guidance for creating concrete career plans, developing required skills or receiving individualized advice on matching abilities to career options. Comparing the three domains, career readiness was perceived as the most effective aspect of guidance and counselling services, followed by personal growth, with academic support trailing behind. The quantitative and qualitative data together indicate that while students benefit from interpersonal development, career awareness, and motivational support, strategic academic guidance particularly in time management, study skills, goal setting and translating learning into measurable outcomes remains the most underdeveloped area.

These findings suggest that secondary school counselling services in Vihiga County are moderately effective, with strengths in career awareness and personal development. Enhancing structured academic support and practical career planning interventions, as well as expanding stress and conflict management programs, would help provide a more balanced, holistic approach to student development. These insights align with the broader literature, which emphasizes that comprehensive school counselling programs are most effective when they integrate all interventions in a consistent and systematic manner (Mbiti, 2016; Chege & Karanja, 2019; Wanjiku, 2017).

4.5 Relationship between Perceived Accessibility and Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services

Table 5: Relationship between Perceived Accessibility and Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services

		Correlations	
		Accessibility of Guidance and Counselling Services	Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services
Accessibility of Guidance and Counselling Services	Pearson Correlation	1	-.091
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.123
	N	287	287
Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services	Pearson Correlation	-.091	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.123	
	N	287	287

As shown in Table 5, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to determine whether a significant relationship exists between students' perceptions of the accessibility of guidance and counselling services and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these services in supporting personal growth, academic success and career readiness. The analysis revealed a weak and non- statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables $r(285) = -.09, p = .123$. This indicates that there is no statistically significant association between how accessible students perceive guidance and counselling services to be and how effective they believe those services are in enhancing their development. In other words, students who felt that counselling services were easier to access did not necessarily view them as more effective and suggests that accessibility alone may not be a strong determinant of how students evaluate the usefulness or impact of guidance and counselling programs.

This lack of a meaningful correlation suggests that factors beyond accessibility such as quality of services, counselor competence, student trust may play a more crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of effectiveness. It also implies that increasing access alone may not be sufficient to improve the impact of counselling services unless accompanied by improvements in delivery, content and responsiveness (Wambu & Fisher, 2015; Chege & Karanja, 2019). From a practical standpoint, this implies that simply expanding access points (e.g., increasing availability or sessions) may not necessarily enhance students' experiences or outcomes unless service quality and relevance are simultaneously improved. Based on these results, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between perceptions of accessibility and perceptions of effectiveness is retained. That is, the study did not find sufficient evidence to support a significant correlation between the two variables.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Vihiga County extend beyond mere provision to play a meaningful role in shaping learners' personal growth, academic success and career readiness. While the services are generally accessible, particularly in terms of physical location and availability of counsellors, inconsistencies in awareness, communication, confidentiality and visibility limit their full utilisation across schools in Vihiga County. The services demonstrate stronger influence on career readiness and personal growth than on academic success. Learners tend to benefit more in areas of self-awareness, interpersonal relationships and career awareness, while outcomes related to academic performance, study skills, time management and stress management remain comparatively weak. This reflects a system in Vihiga

County that is more development-oriented than academically transformative. Accessibility alone is not a sufficient determinant of effectiveness. The absence of a significant relationship between accessibility and effectiveness suggests that the impact of counselling services in Vihiga County is shaped more by factors such as service quality, counsellor competence, learner engagement and adequacy of resources than by availability alone.

5.2 Recommendations

From the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need to enhance the visibility and communication of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Vihiga County so that all learners are fully aware of available support systems and how to access them.
2. Strengthening the professional capacity of teacher-counsellors through continuous training, specialization and reduced teaching workload is necessary to improve the quality and consistency of service delivery in Vihiga County schools.
3. Schools in Vihiga County should reinforce structured academic counselling interventions focusing on study skills, time management, goal setting and academic monitoring to improve academic outcomes.
4. Greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening stress management and conflict resolution components to address weaker areas of personal development among learners in Vihiga County.
5. Education stakeholders in Vihiga County should establish clear implementation frameworks and ensure adequate provision of counselling resources to promote consistent and effective delivery of services across schools.

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