

Perception of the Gifted Students on the Influence of Mentorship and Counselling Services on Academic Performance. A Case of Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions of gifted students regarding the influence of mentorship and counselling services on their academic performance, focusing on Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Gifted students often possess exceptional abilities and require specialized support to maximize their potential. Mentorship and counselling services are crucial interventions in nurturing giftedness and addressing the unique academic and socio-emotional needs of these students. However, the extent to which such services impact academic performance from the perspective of gifted students remains underexplored, particularly within the Kenyan context. Through survey research design and interviews and focus group discussions data collection methods a sample size of 120 form three and four students respondent was used. The study findings indicate that seventy four (74) gifted students desired the presentence of mentors and role models in their studies. The findings contribute to the understanding of effective strategies for supporting gifted students in Kenyan educational settings and inform the development of targeted interventions to enhance their academic success and overall well-being.

Key words: Gifted students, Mentorship, counselling, Academic Performance

INTRODUCTION

Gifted students possess unique academic and emotional needs that require specialized support to fully develop their potential. Mentorship and counseling services have been recognized as critical components in addressing these needs. It is also crucial for administrators, teachers and others within the school environment dealing with gifted and talented students to know what to expect of them. However, this is only possible if factors challenging educational programming for gifted and talented among students in an existing education system are identified and documented. Given that gifted students possess unique cognitive abilities that set them apart from their peers, these students often demonstrate advanced levels of reasoning, problem-solving skills, and an insatiable curiosity about the world around them. However, without the proper educational environment, these innate talents can remain untapped, leading to boredom and a lack of engagement in traditional classroom settings. Therefore, these highlights the importance of creating educational environments that challenge and stimulate gifted students. It is precisely why gifted students need differentiation to nurture their exceptional potential and ensure they continue to grow intellectually and emotionally.

Marland report (1972) defines gifted children as those who perform well using general mental ability and have excellent special abilities in a certain academic field, creative and productive thinking, leadership ability, talent in visual performing arts, and/or psychomotor ability. Woods (2016) defines gifted and talented children as those distinguished from their peers by their general and/or special abilities. Gifted children are rare, while the adults' ability to perceive giftedness is often quite limited (Kelemen 2012). In most cases, recognizing gifted children is difficult (Pfeiffer 2002). According to Mbiti (2015) the mere existence of specialists for instance rainmakers, kings, medicine men and women and religious leaders signify existence of giftedness and talentedness among people. According to him in some societies it was believed that the medicine men possessed special powers obtained either through eating certain medicines or inheritance. To him, specialist

rainmakers not only solicited physical rain, but also symbolized man's contact with the supernatural (God). He argues that others such as diviners and mediums were gifted individuals with the capacity to unveil mysteries of human lives. Formation and sustenance of various powerful monarchs are evidence of gifted kings, queens and rulers in general in African societies. This implies that giftedness and talentedness are key aspects in the economic and social development of any nation. The study seeks to unravel the place of mentorship and counselling in the enhancement of these outstanding abilities. In this study, mentorship implies a dynamic relationship typically characterized by the transfer of knowledge, skills and experiences from the more experienced person (mentor) to the less experienced individual (mentee). Counselling is helping and learning oriented process in which an individual learn how to use their personal resources to make decisions or choices and formulate new ways of behaving, feeling and thinking. Both mentorship and counselling services play a pivotal role in enhancing the academic performance of gifted students. By providing tailored support that addresses both their intellectual and emotional needs, these services help gifted learners to thrive in their educational environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gifted students often face unique academic and socio-emotional challenges that necessitate specialized support. Mentorship and counselling are critical in providing this support thus helping gifted students to navigate their educational journeys and optimize their academic performance. Mentorship can significantly impact the academic performance of gifted learners. Brown et al., (2011) indicates that mentorship provides personalized guidance, helping students to set and achieve academic goals. Mentors can also offer insights into advanced topics stimulate intellectual curiosity and provide emotional support, which are crucial for the holistic development of gifted learners. Brewer and Teeter (1999) confirm that as early as 3000 BC, the Egyptians had started to send their bright learners to court schools or assigned mentors to work in intensive internship to develop their special talents. As a result, a majority of eminent adults had the help of able mentors at critical phases of their lives (Bloom, 1985; Gardner, 1994). Having an apprentice relationship with an appropriate role model can make a huge difference. This is one reason why graduate education in sciences in the United States is best on apprenticeship students in Doctor of philosophy (PhD) programmes in sciences learn at elbows of their supervisors, not from reading books or listening to lectures (Howe, 2000). This implies students learn from hands-on experience under the guidance of their supervisors. In Kenya, addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students through mentorship and counselling can significantly contribute to their holistic development. Such programs as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) could be incorporated into the school curriculum as a way of providing explicit instruction on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making for gifted students. These lessons can help such students develop essential social and emotional competencies necessary for fitting well into the society. Mentorship programs where gifted students are paired with adult mentors who can provide guidance, support and encouragement can be employed. As noted earlier, the United States as well as the ancient Egyptians utilized this approach. Mentors can offer valuable insights, share experiences and serve as positive role models for navigating social and emotional challenges in their day-to-day lives within and without the school environment.

Additionally, counselling services provided by school counsellors tend to address the unique needs of gifted students (Silverman, 2013). Counselling sessions can offer a safe space for gifted students to express their feelings, explore coping strategies and develop resilience in managing stress, perfectionism and other emotional difficulties that they could be experiencing within and without the school setting Peterson (2015). Further, learning institutions can establish school climate and culture that foster positive values, diversity, respects individual differences and promotes acceptance and inclusivity. This implies creating a supportive environments where gifted students feel understood, accepted and encouraged to embrace their unique identities and characteristics.

In addition, professional development for educators create opportunities for teachers and other school staff to enhance their understanding of giftedness. As a result, enhance their ability to support the social and emotional development of gifted students. Educators Equipped with strategies for differentiation, positive behaviour management and fostering resilience in gifted learners are very instrumental in the overall social development

of gifted students. By implementing these initiatives, schools in Kenya can create a nurturing and supportive environment that empowers gifted students to thrive academically, socially and emotionally. These approaches ensure that gifted students receive appropriate support tailored to their individual strengths and needs. Secondary schools can also facilitate peer support groups or clubs specifically for gifted students. With such, gifted learners can connect with like-minded peers where they can share experiences and build meaningful relationships. The mentioned groups can foster a sense of belonging while reducing feelings of isolation and promote positive social interactions. Parental involvement where parents are enlightened about the social and emotional needs of gifted children may be employed for the optimal exploitation of potential among the gifted learners. This involvement gives parents opportunities to support their child's development. All these highlighted approaches aim at providing resources, workshops and support groups for parents to learn effective parenting strategies, communication skills and ways to nurture their child's social-emotional well-being which is essential in academic performance of the gifted learners.

Gifted students typically benefit from differentiated instruction, which involves modifying the curriculum to provide more challenging and engaging content. This can include acceleration, where students progress through educational material at a faster pace and enrichment. With such curriculum, gifted students experience a deeper exploration of subjects beyond the standard curriculum (Vanguard Gifted Academy, 2024). Personalized learning plans, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), are also crucial in addressing the specific needs of gifted learners by outlining goals and appropriate instructional methods (Vanguard Gifted Academy, 2024). Conversely, it is important to support the social and emotional development of gifted learners. Provision of comprehensive support for the social and emotional development of gifted learners is essential in fostering their well-being, maximizing their academic potential and nurturing their holistic growth. This support encompasses understanding their unique needs, creating inclusive environments, offering tailored interventions and promoting positive peer relationships and self-esteem. These students may experience asynchronous development, where their intellectual growth surpasses their social and emotional maturity, leading to potential challenges in social interactions and emotional regulation. Reis and Renzulli (2011), established that providing a supportive environment that includes social-emotional learning programs and mentorship can help gifted students navigate these complexities. It can then be concluded that the cited scholars and researchers reiterate that the unique characteristics among gifted students require accurate identification and supportive educational provisions to enable the holistic development of their intellectual, social, and emotional growth. This implies that having recognized the unique characteristics and needs of gifted students, there is a need to help them to the extent they develop essential skills like social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies which are prelude to enhancing their academic achievement. As a result, these calls for mentors and counsellors to support such students exploit their unique potentials to the fullest. Hence the gap that this study aims to address.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The section mainly includes: description of the and geographical location of study, research design, research population and sample size, sampling procedures, data collection instruments. This study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County. The County is one of the 47 counties of Kenya located in the former Rift Valley Province. Eldoret has the county's largest population centre as well as its administrative and commercial centre (Uasin Gishu County overview, 2020). The county was selected for the study because it has both the urban setting with Eldoret Town as its headquarters and rural settings, which serves as the country's breadbasket due to diverse agricultural engagements in both crop and animal production as a result of cool temperate climate. The county borders Trans-Nzoia County to the north, Elgeyo-Marakwet and Baringo counties to the east, Kericho County to the south, Nandi County to the south, south-west and Kakamega County to the west. The county hosts numerous industries with cosmopolitan populace. Students admitted to schools in Uasin Gishu County are from varied backgrounds with different cultures and socio-economic status, thus varied giftedness given its local population as well as hosting two national secondary schools namely Moi Girls High School- Eldoret and Chebisaas Boys High school.

The study adopted a survey design, which is deemed the most appropriate because this was an exploratory and descriptive study meant to examine the perception of gifted students on the influence of mentorship and

counselling services on academic performance. Additionally, the design was selected because of its ability to systematically gather factual quantifiable information necessary for decision-making about characteristics of populations. Further, this design was adopted because it allowed the researcher to cover a wide area during data collection, which makes it possible for the findings to be generalized and cover the entire group of gifted students in the country. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 30 schools from the research population of 152 secondary schools in the geographical location of the study. This technique ensured equal chances to all categories of schools to participate in the study. The sample size comprised of form 3 and 4 gifted students cutting across both private and public secondary schools in the county. The desired sample size 120 students was obtained based on Cochran (1977) formula from the research population of 153 gifted students identified using Stanford-Binet IQ test, class performance and teachers observations. In order to elicit information from the students, the study used a Likert scale types of question in a paper questionnaire was used to collect data. This is because the questionnaire can be completed at the respondents own time as opposed to interviews schedules. As a result, the research ensured privacy and confidentiality of the respondents by employing anonymity on the questionnaire. The filling of the questionnaire was also on voluntary basis as written informed consent was obtained from the heads of schools. There was no coercion for the gifted students who did not participate on the study. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) confirms that questionnaire gives the respondents complete freedom of respond. Also, they elicit information on appropriate area to which participants will respond objectively. The items in the questionnaire were constructed with regards to the factors under investigation identified in the objective in of the study with a typical five point Likert scale having positively stated items scored. The most favourable responses of the Likert scale were strongly Agree and it were valued at 5 while the most unfavourable were strongly disagree valued at 1.

Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

After data collection, responses from all items were cross checked to facilitate coding and processing for analysis using descriptive statistics. The collected data were analysed based on the research objectives. Data collected was analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. Data was presented using tables, pie charts and graphs.

Table 1. Age distribution of the students respondents

Age distribution	Frequency	Percent
13-14 yrs	15	13.9
15-16 yrs	40	37.1
17-18 yrs	36	33.3
19-20 yrs	17	15.7
Total	108	100

Out of the 108 students sampled, 13.9% were in the age bracket of 13-14 years while (37.1%) were aged 15-16 years, 33.3% were aged 17-18 years while the rest15.7% were aged 19-20 years. This is indicative that majority of the students were in the age bracket of 15-16, followed by 17-18 years old therefore their reasoning is mature enough and the response would be reliable. In addition, the research was conducted among the form 3 and 4 students and most of them naturally fall in this age bracket.

A school is a social institution where formal learning takes place. As a result, there are some factors within the school that may influence the academic performance of the students. This information has been presented in table 2

Table 2. Perception of gifted learners of the mentorship and guidance and counselling services

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Totals
The school provides special counselling resources for gifted learners within the regular classroom environment	36%	40%	13%	7%	4%	100%

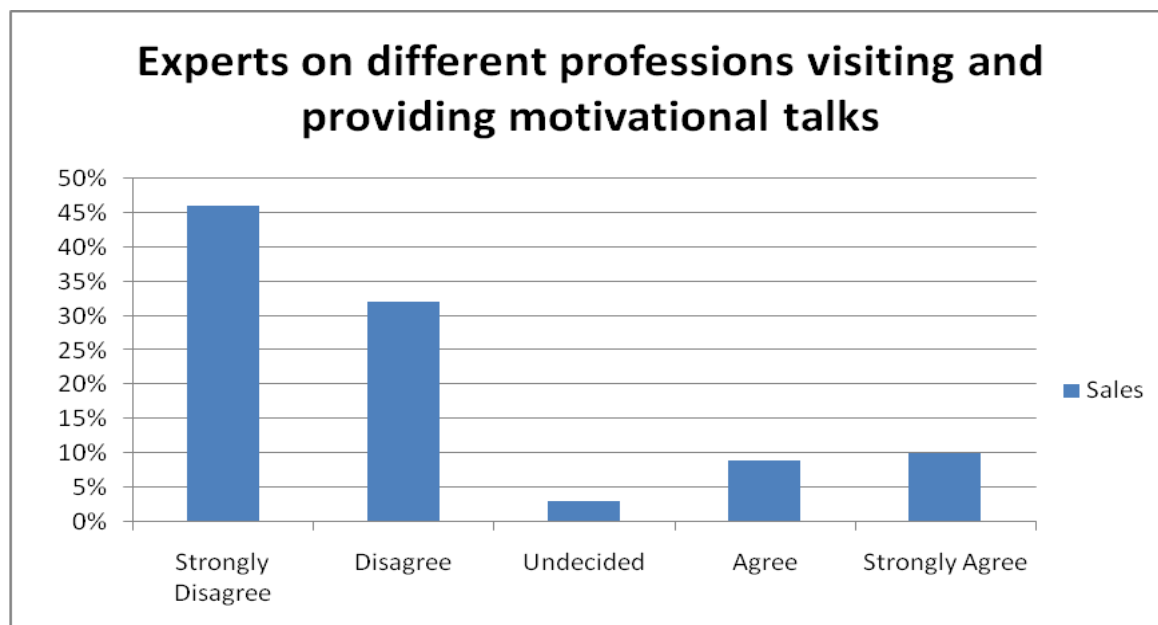
The school does special counselling for gifted learners and their parents/guardians to point out the importance of further education	33%	24%	27%	16%	0%	100%
The schools in conjunction with NGO's have ways of eliciting funds for gifted learners from humble background to advance their education after secondary school thud advancing performance.	50%	25%	10%	10%	5%	100%
The school encourages ability grouping of gifted learners	39%	35%	4%	8%	14%	100%
Opportunities for peer counselling are provided especially for gifted students.	48%	25%	13%	5%	9%	100%
School provide guidance and counselling materials (textbooks and Magazines that are appropriate for gifted students	41%	28%	9%	12%	11%	100%
We have experts on different professions visiting and providing motivational talks	46%	32%	3%	9%	10%	100%
The school has a special room for counselling services to be provided which is well equipped.	38%	36%	18%	8%	0%	100%
I feel comfortable working with mentors and role models	5%	15%	0%	25%	55%	100%

Key

Strongly Disagree D = Disagree U = Not sure A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

From the findings it was evident that 50% (54) of the respondents were of the perception that the schools in conjunction with NGO's have ways of eliciting funds for gifted learners from humble background to advance their education after secondary school. This implies that learners from humble background were enabled to pursue their education to higher levels of learning. A greater majority of learners 78% (72) students perceived that the schools did not have experts or mentors visiting and offering mentorship and counselling for gifted learners whereas 55% (60) which is a greater majority were of the perception that they were comfortable being paired with mentors. Sadly a greater majority of respondents 74% (69) observed that there were no counselling offices or rooms in their schools let alone counselling programmes for gifted students. This results indicate absence or inadequacy of counselling and mentorship services in schools.

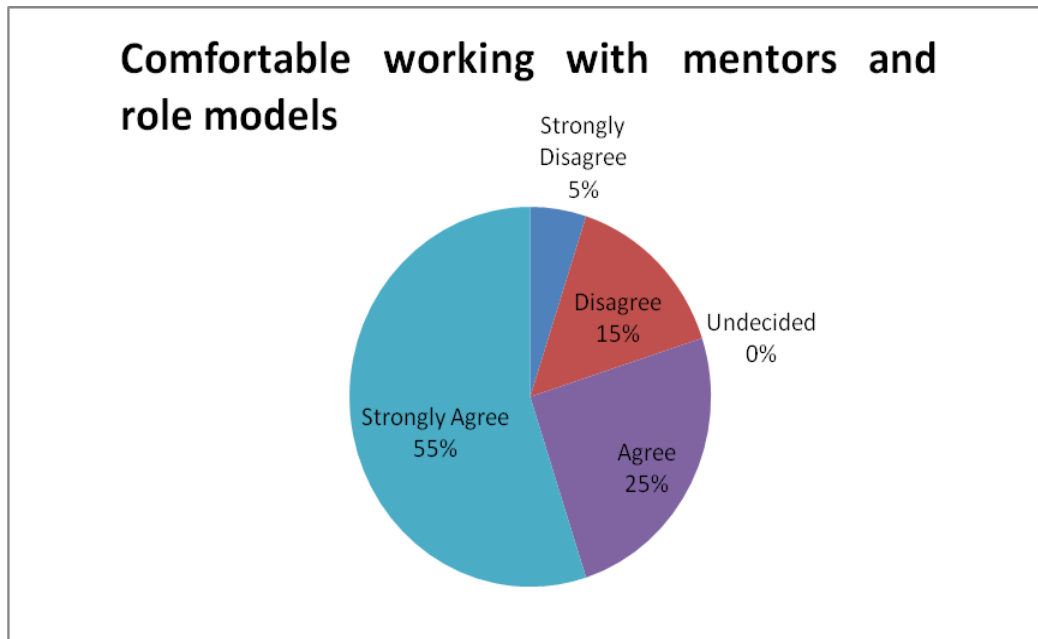
Figure 1. Experts on different professions visiting and providing motivational talks



From the findings it was evident that 46% (48) perceived that there are not experts on different professions

visiting and providing motivational talks to them. This implied that on very rare occasions do the schools organize for special counselling for these students thus denying them an opportunity that would have led to a positive impact on academic performance.

Figure 2. Comfortable working with mentors and role models



From the findings it was evident that 25% (23) were of the perception that they were comfortable working with mentors and role models and a majority 55% (51) of the respondents were very comfortable working with mentors and role models. This implied that quite a good number (74) of gifted students liked working with mentors and role models in their studies. However, there were paired with none as indicated by the study findings. Mentors and role models help the students make important life decisions and work hard to achieve ambitions and academic dreams for instance career choice.

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This part presents a summary of the whole study and discussions of the findings of the study. In addition, the implications and policy recommendations derived from the findings are stated. This section also presents suggestions for further research. The study wanted to determine the perception of gifted students in secondary schools on mentorship and counselling services as a booster or a hindrance to academic performance. Mentoring is a collaborative relationship between a more experienced individual (the mentor) and a less experienced individual (the mentee) that is focused on the mentee's personal and professional development. The study established that though gifted students were not offered academic and social counselling services, these services are very crucial as confirmed by other researchers. They observed that a mentor provides guidance, support and knowledge to the mentee. Further, they share their expertise; experiences and insights that help the mentee grow, learn and achieve their goals (Dahlberg & Byars-Winston, 2019; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008).

A mentor relationship is broad thus goes beyond teaching or coaching. As described above, it should help the mentee develop professionally and personally. There is also often a personal bond. The relationship is characterized by two main functions: psychosocial support and career support. Psychosocial support may include counselling the mentee about anxieties and uncertainty, providing friendship and acceptance and role modelling. Career support includes career guidance, skill development and publicly acknowledging the mentee's achievements (Dahlberg & Byars-Winston, 2019). From the findings of this study it was evident that 25% (23) were of the perception that they were comfortable working with mentors and role models and a majority 55% (51) of the respondents were very comfortable working with mentors and role models. This implied that quite a good number (74) of gifted students liked working with mentors and role models in their

studies. This means the study findings concurs with the findings of other studies as already noted.

This study established that a majority 55% (51) of the gifted learners yearned to have mentors and role models. The presence of mentors would mean gifted students will access guidance that is essential in helping them choose their career paths and get focused on their studies and goals in life. This is in line with other studies which have established that in recent years, mentorship has evolved from being a one-way relationship where the mentor directs the nature of the relationship to a more reciprocal and collaborative relationship in which both parties benefit (Dahlberg & Byars-Winston, 2019). Mentors are crucial as role models who have excelled in their respective fields therefore providing guidance and support to their mentees. They play a significant role in personal and professional development, often serving as an inspirational force through their own achievements and experiences.

Given that, mentoring of students provides them with guidance that is essential in helping them choose their career paths and get focused on their studies and goals in life. The research findings indicate that a greater majority of respondents 46% (48) reported that mentorship and counselling services were missing in schools and where they were present they were inadequate. They pointed out that there were no professionals invited to give motivational talks and act as role models especially for the gifted learners. Whereas this was the position of things in schools, a greater majority 55% (58) of the same students indicated that they will be very comfortable if a signed mentors or experts to guide them in their school life as well as social life. The pairing of experts/mentors with gifted students would help them cope with difficulties experienced during adolescent adjustment and problems due to their superior abilities with others (teachers and students) as well as making correct career choices decisions. The National Literacy Trust (2006) in its research confirmed that there are strong local effects underlying educational performance. These comprise religious, social class, ethnicity and gender, which are intricately interwoven with regard to performance. Freeman, (1996) identified students who underachieve yet they are higher achievers as would display symptoms of depression, talk about suicide, and/or are in danger of substance abuse as a result of lack of guidance and counseling services to such students. Therefore, schools should invest in enhancing counseling services, focusing on the specific emotional and social needs of gifted students. This may include training counselors to address issues such as stress, perfectionism and mental health concerns. When guidance and counseling services are made available, students are not only able to handle stressful situations but also able to put their priorities right. They would make correct and acceptable decisions in the society and within the school environment. The present study therefore demonstrate the need for mentorship and counseling services in schools as they help in boosting academic performance of the gifted learners. The absence of these services is likely to impact negatively on such students academic performance as indicated by (NTL, 2006 and Freeman, 1996). Therefore, mentoring and counseling services need to be made available for gifted students in schools. This study findings concur with the assertion that gifted students suffer from unique stressors and are vulnerable to difficulties with emotional, intellectual and social adjustment (Tuckman, 1998).

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that Kenyan secondary schools as well as the government have not invested on provision of mentorship programs and mentors for its gifted learners yet these have an influence on the said learners academic development Therefore, the need for mentors and mentorship programmes in secondary schools. With such programmes, gifted students will gain from apprentice relationship geared towards successful career orientation and general development. These was and has been the case in Egypt and the US where many eminent adults had the help of able mentors at critical phases of their lives (Feldhusen, 1995: Gardener, 1994) and this has gone a long way in boosting the mentioned countries socio-economic development due to presence of intellectually superior professional across all economic sectors. This is very crucial in any nation's socio-economic development upon which Kenya is not exceptional. The findings contribute to the understanding of effective strategies for supporting gifted students in Kenyan educational settings and inform the development of targeted interventions to enhance the academic success and overall well-being of the gifted students in secondary schools. That mentorship and counseling services play a pivotal role in enhancing the academic performance of gifted students. In fact, by providing tailored support that addresses both their intellectual and emotional needs, these services help gifted learners to thrive in their educational environments. As schools and educational institutions continue to develop and implement these programs, the potential for gifted students to reach their full potential becomes increasingly attainable.

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