

Assessing Status of Christian Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools in Malawi

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100402>

Received: 24 November 2025; Accepted: 30 November 2025; Published: 12 December 2025

ABSTRACT

Guidance and counseling has grown up to become a part and parcel in teaching and learning world. However, in some parts of the world Christian guidance and counseling services are still lagging behind albeit recognizing it's utility, this paper evaluates the current state of Christian counseling services in secondary school in Malawi based on a review of various research studies, literature, and documents that examine the availability and impact of Christian guidance and counseling in promoting student's well-being in both public and private secondary school in Malawi, as provided by Christian practitioners. The study uses humanistic learning theory which understands the need to create conducive learning environment in schools which are also accessible through effective guidance and counseling services and facilities. This paper opens our insight to the fact that Christian guidance and counseling services available not only in Malawi but also across the world are career counseling, induction counseling, academic counseling, spiritual as well as referral counseling. The facilities available are problem checklist card, guidance and counseling office, counseling records book, guidance and counseling guideline counselors' scheme of work, file cabinet, availability of teachers/guidance and counseling staff and library books. However it has been noted that the series and facilities are largely absent in most secondary school because the necessary infrastructure and components related to Christian guidance and counseling services are missing in many schools. The study recommends the Christian delegates, government and education overseers to find possible strategy to improve the status of Christian guidance and counseling services and facilities available in secondary school should complement one another in the quest to effectively implement guidance and counseling services in schools.

Keywords: Education, Christian, status, guidance and counseling, teacher - counselor, facilities.

INTRODUCTION

This paper understands that, Christian guidance and counseling services are of paramount importance based on the fact that the Christian institutions and their related services are the most trusted one compared to some other public institutional services. Of the major aspects in examining such status, it is important to know whether the services are available, the effectiveness of the services, counselor qualification and training, integration of the services within the school system, challenges and impact.

These programs are designed to help students align their abilities, interests and values while fostering their overall potential. Additionally, they provide guidance on career and subject selection, address issues related to discipline, education social interaction, and psychological well-being, and support student's in adjusting to school life (Gerardo, 2006). Watanabe - Muraoka (2007) reported that, the primary aim of guidance counseling services in secondary school is to assist student's in cultivating self - awareness, decision - making skills, life planning, behavioral improvement, and the ability to manage social and emotional challenges. Hence, Christian religion is at fore front in improving lives of many people through provision of guidance and counseling services and for students, nearly all strategy for personal and carrier path growth. Guidance and counseling fosters psychological well-being; for instance, is recognized for its role in fostering problem-solving abilities, self-awareness, and environmental mastery, all of which help individuals navigate life's challenges (Yu, Shek & Zhu, 2019; Baugh, 2018, Nelizone-Jones, 2020). The services also play a vital role in supporting, development, and enhancing personal growth and resilience, development and enhancing

psychological resources (McLeod, 2018, Nelizone-Jones, 2020). Therefore, students in schools and various educational settings are equally important in receiving guidance and counseling services as they are supposed to be well guided and developed both psychologically and academically.

Counseling has traditionally been offered in healthcare settings by mental health professionals, including psychologists, psychiatrist, mental health nurses, social workers, and counsellor. However, schools have also discovered the need to offer guidance and counseling services after realizing occurrence of various problems among students and staff. Kavindo (2018) reports that students in secondary schools often encounter social problems like difficulties in associating with others both at school and outside the school environment, problems relating to peer of the opposite sex, problem of finding intimate friends and acquaintance, conflicts of all sorts among individual and communities, problems of losing loved ones leading to grief and bereavement, problems of coping with being in an orphanage after losing parents/guardians. This exhibit either inadequacy or non-availability of guidance and counseling services and facilities in schools be it a government one or a Christian one.

Globally, both Christian and secular counseling are increasingly acknowledged as essential factors in improving the retention and academic performance of secondary school students despite existence of formal government related guidance and counseling. Religious institutions like temples, churches, and mosques contribute to supporting individuals facing psychological challenges (Harris et al, 2006, Jain & Jadhav, 2009; Khandelwal et al, 2004). In religious context, counseling is often provided by spiritual leaders such as imams, rabbis, priests, and other members of the clergy (American psychiatric association, 2016). Since the Christian guidance and counseling services are well acknowledged by majority of believers and non-believers as the government and community feel it is safe to practice such services in schools. It is equally important to often examine the status of the services in terms of availability, effectiveness, counselor qualification and training, integration of the services within the school system, challenges, impact as well as policy and institutional support.

It is a fact that schools in the contemporary world have established various structures and resources to implement guidance and counseling services. The governments also invite Christian counselors to preach and offer guidance and counseling services to students a quest to build well-mannered learners and communities. It is noted that the concentration of other school related problems like food school insecurity (Simwaga, 2017), student resilience (Wolmaga, 2014) and students dropout (Wallen, 2015) have been given more attention. Other studies, have focused on academic advising (Supagi, 2011) and transitional challenges in secondary school (Mlotwa, 2012) among others. Despite this understanding, few studies have focused on status of Christian guidance and counseling aspects from different perspectives in secondary schools.

Phiri (2010) argued that following Malawi's Independence in 1964, both the new government and churches initiated several educational reforms that transformed the education system and church-run school. Phiri (2010) mentions that counseling services were offered in schools under the Livingstonia synod, and Senelson (1978) noted that although counseling and education offices were established at the Livingstonia synod, it wasn't until the 1990s that counseling started to gain recognition in Malawi. Phiri (2010) further explains that both the synods education system and the government adopted church educational policies. According to bright (2001), the ministry of education introduced counseling services in 1992, aiming to enhance students' academic performance and reduce juvenile delinquency in schools (Simwaga, 2017).

In low-income countries, such as Malawi, access to formal, high-quality guidance and counseling service is significantly limited, unlike in high income nations where counseling services are more established. These countries often have fewer than two guidance and counseling service worker per 100,000 people, far below the global recommendation of 13 guidance and counseling service professionals (Moeti, 2021). Consequently, many individuals in Africa facing psychological challenges turn to religious organization for guidance and counseling support. Religious leaders primarily offer prayer, counseling, and practices such as casting out demons to address problems affecting the people and students in particular (Dein, 2010).

Nyirenda (2015) discovered that, students in Malawian secondary school were found to have distinct needs and challenges that necessitate the implementation of guidance and counseling services. Teachers recognized the

importance of such services but viewed the role of a counsellor as an added responsibility to their teaching duties. This perception stemmed from the lack of exposure to guidance and counseling during. This perception stemmed from the lack of exposure to guidance and counseling during initial teacher training and the ineffectiveness of top-down in service training programs. Moreover, many teachers were experiencing burnout, stress, and frustration, despite being a critical for delivering and supporting guidance and counseling initiatives in school.

However, the problem I see in the Christian counseling services in Malawian secondary schools is whether there are adequate Christian guidance and counseling services and also if the available services are in what condition. Regarding this stated problem, I asked myself the following question: first, are the Christian guidance and counseling services available in secondary school in Malawi? Second, what Christian guidance and counseling facilities are available in Malawian secondary schools? Hence this paper argues that Christian guidance and counseling services need to be well established together with be required facilities for effective implementation of the programme. This study focuses on determining whether Christian guidance and counseling services are available in secondary school, as well as assessing the condition of the facilities intended for guidance and counseling, as provided by Christian pastors.

Theoretical perspectives guiding the study

Frank (2021) investigated the status of counseling services in public secondary school in ilala municipal, Tanzania, emphasizing the areas that need enhancement in counseling services across the county. Drawing on the humanistic learning theory, development by Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and James F.T. Bugental in the early 1900s. Frank's study sought to uncover the state of guidance and counseling services. This theory suggests that schools should create environments conducive to students feeling comfortable and secure, fostering optimal learning conditions. It also emphasizes that students, as individual, are more influenced by their emotions than by extranet rewards or punishment. Consequently, when students experience distress or sadness, their ability to focus on learning diminishes. Thus, this paper delves into the core principles of the theory, underscoring the importance of effective and guidance and counseling services in Malawian secondary schools as provided by Christian church workers. Such services can help liberate students from self – deception regarding their academic and social life issues and enhance their motivation to learn, regardless of the challenges they face (Purswell, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive review of literature facilitates the integration of diverse methodologies, yielding extensive insights into the status of Christian guidance and counseling services in Malawian secondary schools. Data collection involved synthesizing previous research and analyzing relevant documents. Employing various data collection instruments with a randomly chosen sample aimed to corroborate the study's conclusions (Creswell, 2012).

Concept of Guidance and Counseling

Guidance involves a democratic process where one individual provides assistance or advice to another. According to Crow & Crow (1962), it's about qualified individual aiding people of any age in managing their own lives, shaping their perspectives, making decisions, and carrying their own responsibilities. Counseling on the other hand, is an educational interaction where a trained expert assists others in resolving their issues through face to face dialogue. As stated by Vedanayagam (1998), counseling fosters an accepting and trusting relationship where in clients feel safe to freely discuss their concerns, set goals acquire social skills, and build the confidence to enact positive changes. Teachers play a crucial role in education, ensuring students wellbeing. In the age of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), guidance and counselling are paramount for a child's development.

Christian guidance and counseling in schools

Religious organizations have been playing a significant role in providing counseling services, a practice widely

recognized globally. Across various faiths, counseling has been an integral activity. In the United States, as in other parts of the world, religious institutions are known to offer support to individuals dealing with psychological challenges, particularly within Christian communities (Campbell & Littleton, 2018). These services primary focus on helping church members identify and address mental and spiritual health concerns while encouraging the adoption of effective coping strategies.

Florza (2018) reports that, 25% of Chinese students attending Ivy League secondary school in the USA eventually drop out. The study found that although these students demonstrate high academic performance in their home country, many struggle to the new environment, it has been found that such students do attend regular Christian counseling service. Challenges such as language barriers, difficulties adapting to the education system, financial constraints, and limited social skills were commonly cited as reasons. In addition, Life in secondary often exposes students to transitional challenges, such as personal autonomy, social relationships, roommate compatibility, feeding habits, and adjustment to academic programs. This occurs despite the availability of official counseling services in these secondary schools. These challenges can significantly impact their performance and overall experience in secondary schools (Mlotwa, 2012). Moreover, these difficulties can adversely affect students' mental health, potentially resulting in poor academic achievement and low retention rates.

Abanda (2016) conducted a study at capital hostel, highlighting that the dropout rate among secondary school students in the Livingstonia synod, Malawi, is a pressing issue that requires attention from all stakeholders, including schools and government education officers. The study identified various reasons for student's dropouts, such as the inability to afford school fees and other financial rudiments, poor academic performance due to challenges in keeping up with coursework, and a lack of motivation or focus to continue studying. Additional factors include peer pressure, pregnancy, and involvement in criminal activities. There are cases where students go to parties from Monday to Sunday and end up having no time to study. Kaunde (2016) found out that, the dropout rate at Livingstonia Synod Secondary school stood at 37% due to in adequate department and peer support. This issue was also brought out in the study conducted by Ndegu (2010) who stipulated that student high rate of dropout at Livingstone Synod requires attention. Existence of such problems among students manifest in adequacy of guidance and counseling services both the government and Christian ones.

Researches experience show that many Christian often are asked to provide guidance and counseling in secondary schools. This distrust stems from the perception that some tenets of psychology are incompatible with biblical Christianity teaches that are persons worth comes from being created, valued, and loved by God. A biblical Christianity self-esteem is not rooted in personal achievements but in God's grace, mercy, love and redemption.

Malit et al (2023) notes that many psychologists and psychiatrists agree that faith is a critical element in developing a well-integrated personality. Biblical Christians believes that any solution to human problems must account for the spiritual realm to be truly effective. While psychology, as a non-religious discipline, can offer valuable insights into human behavior, Christian are encouraged to approach it with discernment. They can incorporate psychological concepts into biblical counseling if those ideas align with biblical principles, enhancing the effectiveness of their efforts without compromising their faith. In view of this paper, it is essential for church leaders as most trusted counsellors to therefore conduct effective guidance and counselling in Malawian secondary school no matter how difficulties they face drawing examples from Jesus himself.

At Livingstonia Synod Secondary School, counseling services were introduced to support students in adapting to school life, achieving their goals, and completing their studies on time (Ryanida, 2010). The establishment of the counseling center at Livingstonia Synod dates back to 1990, with centers set up in various parts of the synod (Abanda, 2011). Initially, limited emphasis was placed on training counselors, leading to confusion among many Malawian Christians about the purpose and forms of counseling, as it was often conducted by untrained individuals (Nyirenda, 2015). Challenges such as academic pressure, increased drug availability, student strikes and unrest, sexual assault, school fires, dropouts, and poor academic performance highlighted the urgent need for professionally trained counselors (Nyirenda, 2015).

Although, secondary school have invested heavily in student counseling (Gondwe, 2010) there is empirical evidence showing that the services have failed to effectively improve academic performance and retention rates. The studies (Gondwe, 2010; Nyirenda, 2015 and Maliti 2023) have demonstrated that many students are still dropping out of the secondary schools before completing their courses due to discontinuation or examination failure among other issues while others are transferring from one school to another. The challenges of student dropping out of school is especially important for Christian.

Transitioning into secondary school can be challenges for students. Those entering secondary school for the first time face numerous difficulties in adjusting (Wanga, 2012). They must adapt to a new environment and a different learning style compared to what they experienced in primary school. This stage is not only academically challenging, but it is also a period in a student's life when they are more likely to encounter emotional, financial, and social issues. For example, the excitement of exploring new boundaries and the sense of newfound freedom in a secondary school setting may lead to home, and distractions that affect academic performance. Additionally, conflict with hostel roommate's freedom in a secondary school setting may lead to homesickness, frequent calls home, and distractions that affect academic performance. Additionally, conflict with hostel roommates, especially when students are incompatible, may contribute to negative perceptions of secondary school life (Chirwa, 2015)

There is a general scarcity of empirical studies on counseling services in the secondary schools world over (Ndegwu, 2010) and more particularly, on the role of psycho education in counseling especially in developing countries. This is even though all counseling approaches are tinged on enhancing the psychological resources of individual to enhance the psychological resources of individuals, to enhance functionally, for example many students are vulnerable to secondary school dropout due to their inability to solve problems. Equipping them with problem solving skills. A key aspect in counseling can only be achieved through psycho education. Chimana (2014) asserts that lack of information particularly shortly after diagnosis is a significant unmet need to investigate the counseling, which is one the broad categories of counseling. This paper investigate the status of the counseling services in secondary school in Malawi.

Research objectives

The objective of this paper is to ascertain the status of Christian guidance and counseling services in secondary schools in Malawi based on the availability of the services as well as the availability of guidance and counseling facilities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper focuses on state of guidance and counseling services in secondary schools in Malawi. The comparison covered two main areas; whether the services are available, the effectiveness of the services, counselor qualification and training, integration of the services within the school system, challenges, impact as well as policy and institutional support. The following findings were uncovered.

Christian guidance and counseling services available in Malawi

Schools in Malawi have been witnessing the availability of Christian guidance and counseling services at differing levels. The government has sanctioned two Christian services so far; one is teaching of bible knowledge as a subject from pre-primary to secondary schools making it a compulsory subject. Sanctioning the Christian chaplain and pastors to offer mass prayers and sponsoring various religious events in schools.

In Malawi, schools need such services in order for Christian counsellors, teachers, parents and other professionals in this case to assist students attain best school life. The research question from Kaunda (2016) “which Christian guidance and counseling services do you provide to students in this school?” answers the data of the available Christian guidance and counselling services available as presented in table 1 below:

Table 1: Availability of Christian guidance and counseling services

S/N	Guidance and counseling services
	Career counseling
	Academic counseling (including combination choices)
	Students orientation services
	Gender based counseling
	Spiritual counseling
	Intervention counseling
	Obedience and good manners

Source: Kaunda, 2016.

The findings in the table above mean that, some schools in Malawi provide Christian guidance and counseling services. Important ones are career counseling, academic counseling students orientation, gender based counseling, spiritual as well as obedience and good manners guidance and counseling services. It is understood that availability of such services creates learning and personal growth conditional conducive to students feeling comfortable and secure, fostering optimal growth conditions. The services are a good ground to influence student's emotions than by external rewards or punishment. Consequently, when the services are unavailable, students experience distress or sadness and hence their ability to focus on learning diminishes.

It has been further discovered that Christian guidance and counseling services in both public and private schools are conducted using various available facilities. The finding are condensed in the table provided below:

Table 2: Christian Guidance and Counselling facilities in secondary schools in Malawi

S/N	Facilities
1.	Student problem checklist card
2.	Guidance and counseling office
3.	Counseling records book
4.	Guidance and counseling guideline (notably the bible)
5.	Counselor's scheme of work
6.	File cabinet
7.	Christian guidance and counseling staff (notably and evangelists)
8.	Library books and other reference materials.

Source: Simwaga, 2017

The table above shows that, both public and private schools in Malawi experienced varying degrees of Christian – counselor. The noted facilities are availability, in particular, certain schools featured guidance and counseling officer, these were personal belongings of the Christian – counselor, the noted facilities are student problem checklist card, guidance and counseling office, counseling recorders book, guidance and counseling guideline which mostly were based on biblical visions, counselor's scheme of work, file cabinet, availability of guidance and counseling staff who mostly were Pastors and Evangelists; library books and others reference materials. This entail that schools in Malawi should be equipped with numerous facilities for guidance and counseling services for effective guidance and counseling.

According to the table provided, Christian guidance and counseling services in both public and private secondary schools primarily focused on problem – solving. For instance, certain schools offered career counseling, while others provided academic counseling to aid students in selecting their subjects effectively. Some schools, both public and private, offered obedience and good manners counseling services due to a existence of disruptive behaviors among students and these were available in both types of schools.

Alternatively, frank (2021) outlined how students make career decisions, noting that many opt for subjects that don't align with their skills or aspirations. Despite this, students remain hopeful for future changes, viewing their current studies as a pathway to their desired career. This sentiment is echoed by a student in a student in a focus group discussion.

“..... each learner goes to school with the aim of reaching his/her peculiar target and overall educational achievement. But majority fail to know the appropriate way and subject combination with the faith that later they will get to know what to do” (FGD with students, quoted by frank, 2021).

The above finding means that despite the fact that schools have Christian guidance and counseling services are limitedly practiced and implemented to a full cohort of the learners. As it could be easy for such learned to make subject choice after being guided and counseled and counselled, unfortunately, some are unable to get such service hence do dwell on personal ambitions and or choose subjects by gambling. This is a normal experience to majority of African students and Malawi is not an exception. This paper understands that conducive Christian guidance and counseling services should help students feel comfortable and secure, fostering optimal learning conditions including subject choices.

However, finding from other reports show that teacher counselors often failed to follow up to assess the progress of clients after their initial counseling sessions (Nyirenda, 2015) which necessitates the importance of intervention form Christian counsellors. Moreover, most issues documented in counseling records in the schools did not indicate the outcomes achieved through Christian guidance and counseling services. Therefore, despite the fact that various Christian guidance and counseling services are available in secondary school in Malawi, there is little effective implementation and or application of such services to learning. The application of Christian guidance and counseling services are weak and poorly managed thus requiring increased effort, awareness and practical solutions for effective implementation.

Effectiveness of the Christian Guidance and Counselling services

With the fact that various services and facilities are there to support implementation of Christian guidance and counseling services is great news. However, there is no vivid data on whether the Christian guidance and counseling service and counsellors are effective as per Thomas (2017). The effectiveness of the service depend various aspects as follows;

One is whether the Christian guidance and counseling service is capable of transforming students' academic performance, discipline, moral behavior and personal growth. It is understood that effective Christian guidance and counselling service should bring out the above fruits which are widely seen through students' happy school life, reduced retention and dropouts and better coping mechanisms.

Two is the teachers' and students' perceptions of the usefulness of Christian guidance and counseling service. It is important for an effective service to be acknowledged by the service providers, beneficiaries and overseers. Christian guidance and counseling service among schools in Malawi is practiced publicly with the government officials, teachers, parents, teachers and general community being aware and seeing how it is implemented. Notably questions have raised among those common stakeholders in Malawi such as Chibwana, 2014; Chirwa, 2015 and Kaunda 2016 who posed that students behavior in schools have not been improving to some good number of students, some Christian counsellors do not conduct their service professionally and some schools have been lacking adequate service. This brings to reasoning that the effectiveness of Christian guidance and counseling service in secondary schools is not well perceived among the stakeholders.

Nonetheless, investigations have highlighted a deficiency in the way Christian guidance and counseling service is conducted hence questioning its effectiveness. The continued existence of immoral and indiscipline cases among students, poor performance in studies, continued dropouts are among of the factors diminishing the effectiveness of the service in Malawi. Moreover, shortage of resources and materials designated for guidance and counseling in secondary schools adds to the tally. Munro & Chadzunda (2017) found that many secondary school counseling units lacked essential materials such as pamphlets, posters, and internet access. Additionally, there was a shortage of support materials and curriculum for both teachers and students within these units not only in public schools but also in private schools. This has a lot of reflections to the availability and conditions of Christian guidance and counseling facilities making necessary conclusion that most services are ineffective.

Humanistic learning theory suggests that schools should create environments conducive to students feeling comfortable and secure, fostering optimal learning conditions. This study understands that such environments are only attainable if there are quality and adequate facilities. Both public and private schools in Malawi were found to be lacking counselor's schemes of work and student problem checklist cards. The findings clearly indicate a shortage of Christian guidance and counseling resources in both sectors.

Counsellor qualification and training

It is well understood that effective guidance and counselling service is meant to be conducted by well trained counsellors and or peer counsellors. Christian guidance and counseling service providers in Malawi such as Chaplains and Pastors ought to be well trained to carry the exercise professionally. Maliti et al, (2023) discovered that majority of schools in Eastern Africa lacked adequate and well trained guidance and counselling professionals, most schools tend to use available teachers whose major employment is teaching to also provide counselling. This is no exception with Christian counsellors, the schools have been using Chaplains and Pastors whose main duty is to conduct prayers and other spiritual services to also conduct counselling. Majority of such counsellors are not trained with professional guidance and counselling psychology strategies rather they depend on Biblical and spiritual knowledge of their religion to offer counselling services. This jeopardizes the effectiveness and achievement of the expected outcomes as the unprofessional trained Chaplains and Pastors lack sophisticated skills to deal with the growing student problems in counselling sessions. Similarly, there are no refresher trainings and capacity building programmes meant to improve the professional counselling skills among the counsellors.

Challenges facing the Christian Guidance and Counselling in secondary school

Various challenges have been reported to affect Christian guidance and counselling services not Malawi but different countries of the world. This perception stemmed from the lack of exposure to guidance and counselling among the Chaplains and Pastors and Christian counsellors. Moreover, many Christian counsellors are experiencing burnout, stress, and frustration, despite being a critical resource for delivering and supporting guidance and counselling initiatives in schools (Kaunda, 2016; Osei-Tutu, A., Dzokoto & Affram, 2019).

Other challenges include, shortage of resources and facilities, inadequate personnel, the available personnel being overloaded with other responsibilities such as conducting prayer and bible knowledge teaching, lack of formal employment and lack of community support. Such challenges diminishes their capacity to provide effective guidance since student challenges that require counselling such as academic pressure, increased drug availability, student strikes and unrest, sexual assault, school fires, dropouts, and poor academic performance highlighted the urgent need for professionally trained counselors (Nyirenda, 2015), need well settled Christian counsellors.

Nyirenda (2015) reported that there are some private schools where reference materials and reader resources belonged to individual teacher/Christian counsellors with exception of a very few which belonged to learners affected the ability of all available counsellors to utilize such resources. Majority of the schools both public and private schools lacked specific staff intended to undertake Christian guidance and counseling services. The available ones were teaching staff who were also assigned with the student guidance and counseling roles.

Impact on students' spiritual and academic life

Christian guidance and counseling service is conducted with comprehensive training in spiritual warfare, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of the spirit, and the use of scripture to address clients' emotional, psychological, and spiritual need. This highlights a broader interest among scholars, including professional psychotherapists, Christian counselors, and pastors in integrating the impact of such a service to students' spiritual and academic life. Many seek a practical approach to balancing psychological principles with Christian values, believing this integration can enhance the effectiveness of Christian guidance and counseling.

It is concern of stakeholders that Christian counselling should be judged by the impact it has to the ones being served. This remind us that in case of secondary schools, Christian guidance and counselling must reveal how it has managed to transform students from exercising undesired behaviours to desired ones; from unhappy life to happy life; from poor academic performance to excellent academic performance; from dropping out of schools to completing their studies and from being truants to becoming non truants to mention a few.

Studies by Jobby & Viswasom (2018); Lastari, (2018) and Jankowski, (2021) reveal that schools in majority of African countries have not yet realized the potential positive impacts of not only the government related systems but also of other counselling service providers such as Christian counsellors as well as non-governmental organisations. However, Jankowski (2021) acknowledged that, since most people in Sub Saharan Africa (students inclusive) have strong base of Christian Religious faith, that alone yields positive impact at any counselling service they will do. As such they have strong believe on the Chaplain and pastors carrying out any activity (related to religion, academic or any life aspect).

With such understanding, it is obvious that Christian guidance and counselling in secondary schools must have positive impacts as compared to the government ones. Looking at how the schools in Livingstonia Synod in Malawi have had a strong long time relations with Christian church services. Beneficiaries have revealed different impacts of such services including improved living conditions, educating some students especially for children from poor or orphan families, provision of school related resources and needs such as uniforms, books and meals as well as reducing undesired behaviours among the students.

Campbell & Littleton (2018) asserted that counselling from the church men has been always positively impacted the victims because the methods employed by the Christian counsellors. The encouragement of the love for each other, doing good for one another, avoiding undesired behavior by following Ten Commandments of God and general spiritual motivation have been well received by the church believers. As such, when Christian counsellors conduct counselling in schools, there are more possibilities of creating impact even at a small scale as compared to non-Christian counsellors. In Livingstonia Synod, this has been witnessed by some few studies including Mlotwa (2012) and Nyirenda, (2015). This however, should not undermine the reality that a lot of work still prevails. This is due to the fact that while student population is rapidly increasing, the Christian counsellor population is not. On top of that, while social-academic challenges whose control require guidance and counselling are increasing, Christian professionals dealing with counselling are faced with numerous challenges that hinder their effective implementation of counselling services. Hence the impact of Christian guidance and counselling services in Malawi has not fully been able to bring the impact as per expectations of the stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This paper assesses the status of Christian guidance and counseling services in Malawian secondary schools examining whether guidance and counselling services are available. The findings indicate that Christian guidance and counseling are available in Malawi including career counselling, spiritual counseling, obedience and good manners, academic and induction guidance and counselling. The services are implemented using various facilities including student problem checklist card, guidance and counseling office, counseling records book, guidance and counseling guideline, counsellor's scheme of work, file cabinet, availability of teachers/guidance and counseling staff and library books and other reference materials. However, it has discovered that, the services are rarely implemented in schools due to shortage of facilities including Christian based counsellor staff.

The study has revealed that Christian – counselors were not readily accessible in public and private secondary schools in Malawi, with public schools being more predominant. However, the competency of these counsellor was questionable, as many lacked specialized training in guidance and counseling and had not received in service training. The provision of guidance and counseling services in both types of schools was insufficient to support students overall well-being as the focus was primarily on spiritual and behaviors shaping, neglecting crucial aspects such as life planning and decision making. Moreover, due to inadequate facilities and funding, the delivery of Christian guidance and counseling services in most schools, both public and private, was ineffective. Additionally, students were hesitant to utilize these services because they doubted the Christian counseling ability to maintain confidentiality. Therefore, the paper discloses that, Christian guidance and counseling services available in Malawian secondary schools are inadequate to meet the students' needs despite the fact there is growth need amongst the beneficiaries. This necessitates the need to take serious for strengthening the services and facilities.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE STUDY

To improve the wellbeing and academic performance of secondary school students through Christian guidance and counseling, the following recommendations are proposed:

Government and education overseers should ensure that the guidance and counseling services and facilities available in secondary schools should complement each other in the quest to effectively implement guidance and counseling services in schools. This should be done introducing special committee to inspect and purchase all necessary requirements for program implementation.

Policymakers should make sure that the role of Christian counselor is officially acknowledged in the service framework, allowing them to perform this vital function effectively. Hence duly recognition among Christian counselor should be given priority to enable strengthen guidance and counseling roles for students' academic and personal life achievements. It is essential for school leaders to be trained on the education circular concerning the provisions of school – based Christian guidance and counseling services, so they can effectively support its implementation, additionally teacher – counselors should receive training to enhance their understanding of Christian counselor theories, principles, and strategies, helping to prevent an over – reliance on personal experience and a broad understanding of secular systems.

Schools should adjust their overall schedules to incorporate weekly sessions for offering proactive Christian guidance and counseling services to student concerning various aspects of youth life. Additionally, school should prioritize the inclusion of Christian counsellors to provide essential support such as advocacy, crisis intervention, and life planning for students.

It is crucial to establish a district – level coordination unit to promote knowledge sharing among practicing Christian counselors and act as a central referral hub for students dealing with ongoing challenges.

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