



REVITALIZING QUALITY USING GUIDANCE COUNSELING IN ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: EXPLORING STUDENTS' VIEWS AND ATTITUDES AT HARAMAYA UNIVERSITY

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This study attempts to scrutinize how guidance counseling is implemented and its impact in enhancing quality in higher education institutions. The sole purpose of the investigation is to explore students' views and attitudes and how the current practices of guidance counseling contribute to foster excellence of the various university academic training programs. To this effect, it is believed that the finding related to this study could serve to identify challenges and opportunities, develop an appropriate strategy for future guidance counseling effort in the Ethiopian Universities in general and Haramaya University in particular. The tool designed to serve the purpose is questionnaire, and personal as well as colleague observation of the day-to-day interactions. The findings of this study uncover the fact that students do not have sufficient knowledge on the kind and the extent of guidance counseling services offered in the university campuses. However, about 80 percent of the respondents claimed that they have favorable attitudes toward the guidance counseling services in general. In the study, examination on the differences with respect to certain variables (such as programs, sex, and locality) in perceptions and attitudes toward the guidance counseling services are vigilantly scrutinized. At the end, pertinent suggestions that would assist Ethiopian universities in the sector of guidance counseling are included.

Key Words: guidance, counselling, academic excellence, attitude, perception

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The world in the 21st century continues to undergo considerable changes industrially, occupationally, socially, and economically. These changes are creating substantial challenges for children and young people. A rapidly changing work world and labor force; violence in homes, schools, and communities; divorce; teenage suicide; substance abuse; and sexual

experimentation are just a few examples of these challenges. These challenges are real and they are having extensive impact on the personal/social, career, and academic development of the children and young people (Gysbers, 1999).

Scholars in the field urge that comprehensive guidance and counseling programs are effective in assisting children and young people, along with their parents, to respond to these and similar challenges. It is believed that when school counselors have time, resources, and the structure of a comprehensive program to work in, good things happen, that is, guidance counseling interventions improve academic achievement, students take more demanding courses, students develop and use career plans, and schools have more positive climates (Day, 2004).

In the university teaching learning milieu, guidance counseling is a multi-dimensional form which encompasses personal, academic and occupational perspectives. Hence the need to offer diverse guidance counseling service is foreseeable. According to Day (2004) in the university academic atmosphere, the guidance and counseling practices is an efficient and effective way of supporting and helping students deal with problems and issues in educational, career and personal/social areas. Substantiating Day's conception, Marín insisted that an essential aspect of the guidance counseling service is assisting students in knowing the personal strengths and weaknesses, providing information on ones option, helping the student in the analysis of this information and aiding them in the college admission counseling process (Marín 2006).

However, when one makes a look in to the experience of Haramaya University (one of the oldest university in Ethiopia), it can fearlessly concluded that this support service area (although an important area for sustaining quality in higher education) hasn't been given the necessary attention in terms of appointment of professionals and allocation of material resources. Substantiating these observations, Daniel (2004) in his study ascertained that

Despite the dreadfulness of the challenges and needs for services, the higher education educators in Ethiopia reported that guidance counseling services in the universities are extremely overlooked(Daniel,2004).

Presently in Ethiopian higher education institution, it is a common feeling to experience a large attrition rate of university students. Hegde, et al (2007) in Unpublished Institutional Self Evaluation Document of Haramaya University clearly put it that during the 2005/06 academic years, from regular undergraduate streams 1295 out of 11400 (11%) students admitted having been

dismissed, withdrawn or dropped out. Out of these, 633 were female students that have been dismissed for poor scholastic attainment. On the other hand, personal observation, opinion of colleagues and a check of grade reports clearly showed that the students have low academic standard when they are admitted. Difficulties in understanding English properly, low socio-economic status where potential involvement and expectation of parents are low, personal problems, and lack of interest due to missing their area of choice have been taken into consideration for such poor performance (Ibid, 2007).

Discussion with some instructors and personal observation revealed that the proportion of students who seek guidance services is very low (less than 5%). The capacity of the guidance officer to help the huge number of current students is negligible. As a result, access to adequate academic information is limited. This in turn causes difficulty for students in performing and preparing well for examinations. For this reason a big proportion of students are dismissed and seek readmission in relation to academic problems. Meanwhile, in connection to personal difficulties, it is a frequent phenomenon to encounter behavioral and financial problems of the students. A survey conducted by Tesfahun et al (2006) showed that it is a day to day experience to witness undesirable relationships among students with in teaching and learning environment at Haramaya University. There is no adequate special arrangement to support female students, disabled candidates and those students who belong to group of low socio-economic status.

Regarding vocational issues, students face problems in selecting a field of study that is commensurate with their ability and capacity. The reason accounting for this could be that students have little or no idea how to plan further education and future career choices. Meanwhile, the sudden and sometimes frequent student unrest in the university campus in relation to political, social, racial and state policy has been found to be a critical problem that may have direct or indirect influence on the academic performance of students. To alleviate all these problems, there was no one in charge of the guidance counseling office at the university (until the academic year 2009). At the moment, it is possible to conclude that about 13,000 students in the university campuses have not been getting the respective services properly. An informal and indirect discussion conducted with the dean of students office revealed that there is only one guidance officer who is in charge of the sector. Moreover, the responsible person is not a fulltime staff to shoulder the responsibilities adequately and continuously. In addition to the guidance services, the officer is also responsible for handling a minimum of 12 credit hours in a week with in a semester of the respective departmental load. It can, therefore, be said that this support area is overlooked in the higher institutions in general and at Haramaya university

campuses in particular. Having this in mind, the investigator feels that to fail to notice the problem in question is frustrating; rather we should look at considering its usefulness in seeking answers for the quality concern of the various university academic training programs.

The present topic in the area of guidance services is considered using my teaching experience at Haramaya University and the experience I have with the problems of my students in their academic settings, vocational attainment and future career determination. Above and beyond, the course-*Vocational and Educational Guidance* which I had taken during my post graduate studies enlightened me the problem, and the need to seriously search for remedial solutions. Moreover, Research in higher education institutions on the practices of guidance counseling has been scarce and limited to our country context. Policies and guideline may say a few things about the issues and importance of counseling, but in practice these are non-existent. This is another reason that prompted me to conduct this investigation at this very moment.

There is a great need in guidance counseling programs for a higher awareness of the importance of university counseling services. This research project on Haramaya University counseling services is the first conducted in the site and it should serve as the beginning of a regular and ongoing evaluation of these services. To this effect, the analysis of these results may be used to develop a framework for counseling services and establish an evaluation matrix for these programs. The author believe that a guidance counseling model needs to be developed for counselors and students to follow as a guide modifying and adapting it to their various environments and position of academic life

This investigation examines knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of students in the current guidance counseling services, keeping in mind the actual situation of higher education institutions in the country. In so doing, the researcher is interested to look into the topic entitled “*Revitalizing Quality using Guidance and Counseling in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions: Exploring Students’ Views and Attitudes at Haramaya University*”. Along with this, in treating the present topic systematically, the following basic questions were framed and labeled as shown below:

1. What is the current status of students’ awareness on the usefulness of guidance counseling services at Haramaya University (HU)?
2. How are the guidance counseling services perceived by HU students?
3. Do the students have positive attitudes toward the current guidance counseling practices?

4. Is there any significant difference in perceptions and attitudes in terms of variables such as sex, class/year, program etc. on the guidance services provided by the University?
5. Does the practice of guidance counseling, undertaken as it is, expect to play a role in creating a quality teaching and learning environment?

Objective of the study

The overall aim and objective of this study is to investigate the implementation practices of guidance and counseling at Haramaya University and examine how this service area promotes quality in higher education institutions. In more specific manner, it attempts to:

- explore the current awareness of university students of the guidance counseling services at Haramaya University.
- assess the attitudes of students toward the existing guidance counseling practices at HU.
- discover the value of guidance services in attaining academic excellence as perceived by students.
- examine whether there is a significant difference in perceptions and attitudes in terms of such variables as sex, class/year, programs etc. regarding the guidance counseling services provided by various academic professionals and support staff of the University.
- Suggest directions for the improvement of the present guidance counseling practices.

Context of the Study

Education at the tertiary level came into existence around 1951 in the first University College at Addis Ababa. Up to 1985 there was only one university (Addis Ababa University) in the country. After three decades of functioning as Alemaya College (Under Addis Ababa University), the present Haramaya University was then upgraded to university status in 1985. Today, in Ethiopia about 22 public universities and one private University are in operation. However, these universities cannot be considered to be in the same level of academic work. They could be categorized into two major groups, new and relatively old universities. The new universities, about fourteen in number, were opened towards the end of 2006, the beginning of 2007 and at the end of 2009 academic years. The major characteristics of these universities are that they are

less organization, have poor resources and facilities, as well as a focus on undergraduate programs and specific fields of study. The other nine universities are relatively old as compared to the new universities, and their focus of attention is both undergraduate and post graduate programs. Two universities, Haramaya and Addis Ababa Universities, have more than twenty years experience in teaching, research and outreach programs. As a result, these universities have unique features in terms of dealing with extensive research and wide consultancy services.

At present, in Haramaya University (the former Alemaya University) more than 12,500 students attend at different level of programs (undergraduate, postgraduate) in two major campuses (Haramaya main campus, and Harar campus). More than 800 staff members run the major task of the university academic training programs. Nevertheless, within this number of students and faculty, only one counselor is responsible to lead and coordinate the guidance and counseling units. The author of this study has worked as teacher educator and coordinator of staff development units at Haramaya University for more than ten years.

The topic has been explored owing to the practical importance of guidance counseling services, the value it has in examining difficulties that were most likely to happen in the day to day practices of teaching and learning, and its capacity to improve the quality of student learning. It is believed that the finding out of this study will have broader application to the complex student problems arising in personal, educational and vocational dimensions. As a consequence, the output of this study could make a substantial contribution to individuals such as students, instructors, counselors, curriculum designers, and educational managers and administrators.

The study was intended to examine the attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of students to the guidance counseling services at Haramaya University. It was confined to the regular teaching and learning programs of the University. The others, such as extension (night programs), distance, and summer programs, were not taken into account. The study exclusively focuses on how university students perceive the guidance counseling services, the attitudes they possess towards it, and to what extent they are aware of it. The level of awareness, perceptions and attitudes of instructors and other support staff were purposely excluded due to shortage of time and resources. Despite such constraints, effort has been devoted to make the study as complete as possible.

Review of Related Literature

The guidance officers are expected to provide counseling programs in the academic, career, personal as well as social domains. Their services and programs help students resolve emotional, social or behavioral problems and help them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. Effective counseling programs are important to the institutional climate and a crucial element in improving student achievement. In the following few pages, a collection of sources addressing the effectiveness of academic institution counseling and other student support services; their contribution to the personal and academic success of students, as well as to the achievement of quality education in the various academic programs.

A general thought on guidance and counseling

Cáceres (1976) cited in Marín (2006) regards educational and vocational guidance as one of the counselors' responsibilities. This entails counseling students and their guardian on the relationship that exists between the students' occupational interests and aptitudes with available and realistic educational and occupational options. Once the students make an appointment in an academic program, the process of counseling begins, taking into account their academic qualifications such as their grade point average, academic course selection, standardized test scores, financial need, location and size of the educational institutions, as well as other personal preferences of the student and family.

Placing a student in an appropriate educational institution is the key for academic and social adaptation and success. This statement agrees with (Super, 1990; as quoted in Marín, 2006) and his Theory of Occupational Development which emphasizes the importance of achieving congruence between occupational expectations and self concept. Self concept encompasses self knowledge of our abilities and skills, likes and dislikes, as well as our weaknesses and conflicts. Once the individual finds his place in society he can effectively contribute to his community. Occupationally, the right fit will result in better performance which will bring material and emotional satisfaction. This circumstance demands the presence of an adequate and efficient guidance counseling service in a particular educational institution.

What to do after graduation? If the decision is to continue graduate studies, will the student work? What and where will I continue my studies? The student faces one of the most important decisions in life, a decision that although not set in stone, will require careful analysis while dealing with peer and family pressures. Facing a new independence in a totally new environment with a

completely different structure, the student must apply knowledge and skills learned throughout the previous years of study as well as learn to manage time effectively. This is the beginning of an occupational life plan when the student must learn to balance time efficiently between work, classes, studies, family and friends (Fernando, 2006).

The absence of appropriate counseling might eventually result in poor placement of a student in an academic program; ending up in an unsuitable educational institution; a lack of time management skills; poor adaptation skills to college life; a lack of occupational exploration and selection; or a lack of financial aid to attend college. Hilton (1979) mentions that the ultimate component in a guidance counseling system should be the follow up of graduates in their place of study in order to evaluate the consistency of plans before and after graduation. The analysis of this data is valuable information for the counselor to evaluate the occupational and college counseling services offered at preceding years.

Ferguson (1989) presented a college counseling model in which he stressed the importance of the counselor being informed about available post-secondary options for each student including college size, geographical location, admission requirements and academic programs available. Many students mentioned the fact that due to the lack of information they were not placed in the appropriate institution or academic program, as well as not being able to benefit from available financial aid for further studies. A recurrent comment stated in some studies was the need for a greater number of counselors in educational institutions due to the fact that the ones available cannot adequately manage the large case loads assigned to them (Fernando, 2006).

Adolescents find themselves in an exploration stage, according to Super's Segmented Model for Occupational Development (1990) cited in Fernando (2006). In this period of transition from adolescence to adulthood, tentative decisions will be about future occupations. Some will choose an occupation and look for a full time job for the first time in their lives, others will choose a post secondary educational institution and continue studying, others will join the military and others will choose to take a year off to make a decision. Each decision is important and valid for the student, but it is of utmost importance that this decision is made thoughtfully and carefully. Pressures will abound from parents, peers and educators. The professional counselor is the key person for the student to look to for help and support during this important decision making process. The professional counselor will source the information, help explore options and consider alternatives in this careful creation of a life plan for the student.

Exploration of the Practices of Guidance Counseling in the Country and Overseas

Study conducted in abroad

The nature and quality of the career guidance services depends greatly on the guidance counselor – his/her training in career guidance, and his/her creativity, resourcefulness, assertiveness and initiative; and on the moral and financial support provided by the educational institution administrator (Santamaria & Watts, 2005). Guidance and counseling services in higher education institutions span two extremes: at one extreme are the majority, which provide only the minimum services in the form of the Career Orientation Week; while at the other extreme are a few higher education institutions with more comprehensive and better organized career guidance services offered to senior students before they graduate. According to the authors the following are some of the area where guidance counseling practices are likely to be emphasized:

On entry

A college student who is confused about his/her course choice is given a career assessment test to find out his/her real inclinations. Then he/she is allowed to change courses, but only after passing 30-33 college units. The reason for this is to discourage shifting and to provide opportunities for students to clarify their interests and abilities before they change their course. In addition, many conduct Freshman Orientation or Freshman Development Program to help freshmen know the different curricular offerings of the institution, to get to know the institution and its various services, etc. Another common approach is to have the best faculty teach the “101” courses which are designed to introduce students to particular fields of study, and are required of all students to help them in their curricular program choices.

During college

It is the general practice for a guidance office, if the institution has one, to provide testing services to students on a per-need basis, especially to those who are unsure whether they are in the most appropriate course. Tests of intelligence, aptitudes, interests and personality are usually administered, and the results are interpreted by the guidance counselor to the student. *Career counseling* may be given to students on a per-need basis. The kinds of problems/concerns brought to the guidance counselor are usually of the following kinds:

- being pressured by parents to take a course in order to continue the family history in the same profession (for example, being expected to take law because

one comes from a family of lawyers, to take dentistry because one's parents are successful dentists, etc.);

- no direction in life;
- confusion due to having multiple interests;
- not having the mental abilities to fulfill course requirements;
- negative self-image, lack of self-confidence.

Practicum/on-the-job training (OJT)

The practicum is usually closely supervised by a faculty member who makes unscheduled visits to ensure that the students are actually using the skills they have learned in college. Without such close supervision, there have been reported cases when OJT students were made to do clerical tasks and to run personal errands for employees such as buying food or making bank transactions.

On exit

- Career Orientation Week. Alumni and/or parents are invited to give career talks, or share job-hunting tips, or give coaching on how to make resumes and prepare for job interviews.
- Campus recruitment. Recruitment officers of companies compete to secure the top 10-25% of the graduating class: they interview them and offer them jobs in their companies after passing the interviews and tests.
- Placement. In some education institutions, there is a separate placement office which networks with companies, usually those in which alumni hold senior positions or which are among the Top 500 Corporations for job vacancies that graduates could fill. This office handles training of senior graduating students on how to apply for a job, how to prepare resumes, how to behave during interviews, and other practical how-to issues.
- Jobs/Career Fairs. These fairs can last for 1-5 days. Companies set up their respective booths on campus, post a list of openings for different levels of positions, get applications from interested students and do preliminary interviews. Many students are hired on the spot for the semi-skilled jobs; the rest are given schedules for interviews and testing in the company.
- Career library. In many cases, the "library" consists of a cabinet of brochures, pamphlets and catalogs of different graduate schools and universities in foreign

countries; and of career information on a few occupations and careers, usually produced in foreign countries.

Marín (2006) in his study concluded that the prevailing needs of college admission counseling services expressed by the client can be summarized as:

- a lack of information
- a need for more counselors that would result in more individual counseling and greater number of interventions with students
- occupational counseling and opportunities for internships
- earlier college counseling interventions
- improved personal and professional behavior in counselors
- a desire for a greater involvement of parents in the college admission process

Hernández conducted research in 1988 on student perceptions of the guidance officers. He established that student perceptions of counseling services will determine how much they will use them. He emphasizes that these services are for student, thus enhancing the importance of their perceptions when evaluating these programs. College counseling services should be evaluated periodically to assure their quality and effectiveness. Evaluation is an important part of any professional service as it provides the means to study the perceptions of the clients served.

Guidance services provided at the higher education institutions level should respond to an increasing size of enrollment, and develop a more meaningful set of objectives informed by the growing body of theoretical and research literature devoted to the interaction of college students and the college environment. Unfortunately, however, studies show that the public is not fully aware of the values of guidance and counseling. Nwagwu (1996), for instance, conducted a study on African students and concluded that the area of guidance counseling has been to a great extent neglected in school practice and administration throughout the continent. The study further showed that from the five categories (parents, friends, relatives, classmates and teachers) consulted by students on their educational and vocational future; the teachers were the least frequently consulted. The result implies that either there was no counselor/s in schools or student did not visit them. Any way, the result implies that students or the public do not recognize counseling at large.

A survey Mpofu, et al. (1997) examined the public image of school psychology in 12 east and southern African countries including Ethiopia. According to the

investigators, the public image was reported to be low. Reasons given for the poor public image include the limited services offered by school psychologists, general adherence to traditional beliefs, and professional complacency (that is, low effort on the part of professionals, and the lack of a body of research on which to base practices). Moreover, the attitudes and behavior of school principals and teachers don't seem to be uniform (Seleshi, 1996). Some seem to have positive attitudes toward counseling and appreciate the activities of the counselor. This group of teachers tends to collaborate with the school counselor. Many teachers, however, don't recognize the importance of counseling at all. It is proposed that unless the counselors perform their activities in cooperation with teachers, they cannot be successful (or effective) in their endeavors.

Alutu (2004) explored the State-of-the-art of guidance counseling services of Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria and the provisions for its services in the National Policy in Education. It highlights the set up of guidance counseling at the Federal Ministry level. The effective organization of guidance and counseling services in Nigeria would be a reality, if the federal and state Ministries of Education are able to provide professionally trained guidance counselors, recognize their services in schools and provide them with necessary incentives and facilities.

Another study carried by Onyinyeowuamanam (2005) showed that there has been widespread criticism of the quality of education provided by Nigerian public schools. The report discussed how the school counselor and other school personnel (the principal, teachers, school health personnel, and administrative staff) could cooperate to provide quality education, and reduce or solve educational, vocational and socio-personal problems, such as physical health problems, which could lead to emotional disturbance and stress. It further proposed that the cooperation of the school counselor and other school personnel could help to reduce poor academic performance, examination malpractice, high rate of drop out, deviant behavior and wrong choice of courses and career among students. To this effect, it suggests that the Federal and State governments strongly support the organization of guidance counseling services in schools so as to provide quality education to the citizens.

A study conducted by Alutu (2005) exposed that out of the ninety-six public institutions in Benin City, only twenty-five have at least one practicing counselor. Fourteen schools with practicing counselors were sampled in this study. Data were collected through the administration of a questionnaire on guidance services. Data analysis revealed guidance counseling services are faced with many obstacles which jeopardize effective delivery of the services,

thereby resulting in educational wastage. It was found that funds for provision of basic guidance services are lacking. Most of the vital counseling services needed for quality education are the least regularly performed in schools (e.g. use of psychological tests and keeping of a cumulative record folders). Only 14% of the institutions sampled indicated that the objectives of the National Policy on education with respect to guidance counseling services have been realized to some extent. If the stated objectives of Education in the National Policy on Education are to be achieved, the current status of guidance services needs to be reviewed and positive steps taken towards its improvement.

Arthur (2003) studied the topic “Preparing International Students for Re-entry Transition” and found that international students are a unique population of people in cross-cultural transition. More attention has been paid to their initial adjustment to life in a foreign country than their re-entry experiences of leaving the host country to return home. Counselors are an integral part of campus support services that assist international students to manage cross-cultural transitions. Re-entry counseling can support international students in their transition experiences, provide education about re-entry, and help to develop coping strategies.

A study by Undiyaundeye (2006) identified the enormous challenges around those learners with special need. The findings showed that the attitudes of the majority of the teachers were generally positive but it was recommended that teachers should be better remunerated to further enhance positive attitudes toward the education of special needs learners.

In a similar way, Shuaibu (2004) found that the teacher is a powerful agent. It is expected that he/she should cater for all learners, irrespective of their differences. However, the literature indicates that some children, especially the potentially creative ones, do not have the opportunity to benefit from academic work. This may be connected with their unusual nature and abstract thinking which teachers see as non-conforming, and capable of disrupting the planned activities of the classroom. Teachers are of the view that such potentialities should be discouraged. Discouraging any of the creative potentials will limit creative performance. Most nations of the world owe their development and economic stability to a few creative individuals. Developing nations needs such talent, and their encouragement in all its manifestations cannot be under-rated.

Dwyer, and Cummings (2001) have undertaken research under the title “Stress, Self-Efficacy, Social Support, and Coping Strategies of University Students”. Significant correlations were found for stress reduction with the total number of coping strategies and the use of avoidance-focused coping strategies. As well, there was a significant correlation between social support from friends and

emotion-focused coping strategies. Gender differences were found, with women reporting more social support from friends than men.

These are some of the reviewed experience of overseas educational institutions on the role of guidance counseling in assisting students' learning. What about home experiences? In the following few paragraphs, an attempt is made to highlight the experience of Ethiopian Universities in relation to guidance counseling practices.

The Guidance Counseling Practices in Ethiopian Universities

In the spirit of developing a higher education system together, the Higher Education Relevance Quality Agency (HERQA) believes that an institutional audit of the various academic sectors, including the guidance counseling, will prove helpful to higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education, university communities, parents, students, and employers. This is one contribution to the combined efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of higher education. Along with this, a kind of tracer study conducted during an institutional audit by HERQA in some of the Ethiopian universities is reviewed and incorporated as part of this study.

Adama University

At this university it was intended that there be psychological, social, and behavioral counseling. During the HERQA team audit there was just one counselor when there should have been two. Although some 600 students had benefited from the service, the counselor was concerned that students were not fully aware of the service's existence. Most students were referred to him by members of staff. The service is brought to the attention of students during orientation but it was recognized that this was insufficient. In a measure to raise awareness, the counselor has run a number of workshops, including on HIV/AIDS. The main reasons for students meeting with the counselor were behavioral issues, poor time management, and a lack of study skills.

In the audit report it is suggested that a counseling service is an important element of the student support structure and this has been recognized by the university. The recognition of the need to make its existence better known now needs to be turned into action. While the HERQA team has no reason to doubt the abilities of the male counselor, the fact that he is male may deter female students from seeking counseling (HERQA June, 2008).

Hawassa University

The majority of students claimed that the student support services, including counseling, had been suitable and adequate but the team learned that the professional psychologist hired to provide the counseling service had left the university and a replacement had not yet been appointed. The team also learned that female students were the main client for counseling service and that students could self-refer or be referred by concerned staff. At present it is not possible to determine the level of use of the service or the nature of the concerns that were dealt with. The team commented that a counseling service is an important element of the student support structure and the university needs to re-establish this as soon as possible and make the services known to staff and students (HERQA June, 2008).

Haramaya University

At one time the university used to have a professional guidance counseling officer. However, this had not run for some time due to staffing difficulties. Some counseling practices were provided by the Dean of Students. Also, a nurse provides a counseling program on referral from the clinic. It is thus not surprising that students were generally not aware of the existence of any guidance and counseling services. The lack of good counseling services is a serious concern and one that the university must address as a matter of urgency (HERQA June, 2008).

Gondar University

The university recognized the guidance counseling practices as an important element of a student support structure and this is underlined by its inclusion in the university Senate Legislation (Article 84). The service provided was claimed by the staff member engaged with student counseling to be focused on psychological, social, economical and behavioral issues. However, it was difficult for the HERQA team to obtain verification, through students' experience, of the nature and quality of the counseling services provided. The document revealed that the student representatives claimed there was no well-organized student counseling system in the university. It is therefore clear that there is a mismatch between the university's claim and that of the students. It is observed that the university is lacking a comprehensive plan for giving direction to student services across its campuses. There is also an absence of a well-organized supervisory body to deal with such factors as statistics about usage of the services, evaluative reports and special purpose surveys of student poverty etc. Also, equitable distribution of services across the university's campuses is a challenge; there is evidence that students at the different

campuses are treated unevenly in terms of level of support (HERQA October, 2008).

Mekelle University

The HERQA team discovered the office of the guidance counselor on campus, but was informed that no counselor had been in post for some time and that the professional service was no longer provided. However, the team was told that if a student seeking help turned up at the office when the Dean of Students was available, the Dean would do his best to help. While the work of the Dean must be appreciated, this situation is unsatisfactory. The university must provide a professional guidance and counseling service for its students. Not to do so is a failure to discharge its responsibilities (HERQA October, 2008).

Bahir Dar University

The main services of guidance counseling are personal, social, and academic and vocational advice. Most students self refer to the office, but some students arrive for counseling as a result of encouragement from their friends or a proctor. Although freshman students are informed of the counseling services during their orientation program, the number of students visiting the office is reported as very low in relation to the total number of students in the university and those considered in need of help. It is confirmed that while many students know of the existence of the office, they do not know the specific services offered. They also reported that, as the relationship between students and teachers is not very close, they do not get advice from them and so they are in need of the services of the office (HERQA October, 2008).

Arba Minch University

The service has been assumed to provide academic, social and behavioral counseling to the clients. At the time the HERQA team visited the university it had just one male counselor to address the problems of 8,000 students. Indeed, students confirmed that the work of the counselor was seen as valuable and much appreciated, but indicated that because of other teaching duties he is not always available in his office. The service is brought to the attention of students during orientation but it was recognized by the counselor that this was insufficient. In an attempt to raise awareness, the counselor has prepared brochures and dispatched these to various departments so that they can communicate the information to their students. The main reasons for students meeting with the counselor were reported as behavioral issues, poor time management and lack of study skills. It is understood that although there is no reason to doubt the abilities and sensitivity of the male counselor, the fact he is

male may deter female students from accessing the service (HERQA October, 2008).

Just to make a synopsis on the above studies: it can be concluded that the guidance service likely to be established at various levels of the education ladder need to have two major targets: securing students' academic satisfaction and the provision of quality education to its customers. The lack of the services, or appropriate functioning of it, might result in low achievement and dissatisfaction on the part of student, which might ultimately lead to an educational crisis. Hence, from the various investigations undertaken in this country and abroad, we can learn much about the contribution of guidance counseling services in assisting and improving the delivery of academic programs.

METHOD

Type of Research Design

In this investigation, qualitative and quantitative approaches are amalgamated. Since the research examined the knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes of the representative students, it was conducted as a survey. On the other hand, as the data collection was confined to Haramaya University, it can also be considered as a case study. Hence, this research can be named as a survey within a case study (Yin, 2003).

Subjects

The population for the given study is all students under regular programs in Haramaya University for the academic year 2008/09. As it is very difficult, if not impossible, to include the total population, there was a need for sampling. For the study the sample consisted of 200 students, of which 80 students were female and 120 students were male.

Instruments

A questionnaire for exploring students' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes was used. This questionnaire had two parts: closed type and open ended items. This instrument was developed and validated by the investigator. The reliability of the instrument used to collect data from the respondents was computed and the coefficient of reliability for the questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.86$. The investigator accepted the obtained coefficients of reliability as a satisfactory level of internal as well as overall consistency. With regard to the validity of the instrument in use, the face validity is established through discussion with the experienced teachers in the language and pedagogy departments of the University. The

researcher believes that the questionnaire is the most appropriate and easiest type of data collecting instrument for such a group of respondents. Personal experiences as a staff member and colleagues' informal reflections on the issue are also included as data.

Data collection

The questionnaire was administered at two campuses of HU: Harar health campus, and the HU main campus. As the instrument is a self-reported questionnaire, it is believed that the oral instructions plus the written directions (given at the time of questionnaire administration) offered sufficient direction for the respondents to fill-in the questionnaire without difficulty.

Methods of data analysis

The method of data analysis is mainly quantitative. A few open-ended items in the questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively. Those data which could be put in numerical forms were analyzed quantitatively by descriptive statistics (percentages, mean and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Chi-square test and Analysis of Variance) using the SPSS program. It is believed that the qualitative information secured and analyzed would complement the quantitative information.

FINDINGS

Quantitative data

Table 1. Biographical data of respondents

Academic achievement				Sex				Locality of high school attended				Socioeconomic status							
Below average		Average		Above average		Female		Male		Urban		Rural		Low		Medium		High	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
60	30	100	50	40	20	80	40	120	60	90	45	110	55	110	55	60	30	30	15

From Table 1 it is quite clear that in the sample average academic achievers are higher in number than below average and above average academic achievers. In addition to this, the table also shows that 60 percent of the respondents are male students. The proportion of rural candidates is high, as is the proportion of low socioeconomic level students taking part.

Table 2. Chi-square analysis of the knowledge of students on guidance counseling

	Proportion of Right Response		Proportion of Wrong Response		Total
Observed	54		46		100
Expected	50		50		100
Difference	4		6		

Chi-square is equal to 1.04

As Table 2 clearly shows, the calculated value of Chi-square of 1.04 is not significant at 0.05 confidence level. Hence, hypothesis of equal probability is accepted. It means the average 54 percent of respondents score on the knowledge of guidance counseling is not consistent. This means the obtained average score of respondent knowledge on the guidance counseling services is equal to chance. It can be concluded that the students do not have real knowledge of the services that are currently offered by the educational institution under consideration.

Table 3. Chi-square analysis of the knowledge of students on guidance counseling services across grade level (Year/ Class)

	<i>Class year</i>		
	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd yr and above
Observed	52	54	53
Expected	53	53	53
<i>Difference</i>	1	1	0

Chi-square is equal to 0.038

Table 3 clearly shows that the value of Chi-square is not significant. Hence, the hypothesis of independence is endorsed. It means that knowledge of the guidance counseling services is not dependent on the class level/ academic year of the respondents. In short, whether a student stays for three or more years, or is a new comer, it makes no difference in having knowledge of services rendered by the university in the area of guidance counseling. As a whole, it means that awareness of the guidance services on the part of students is random. Hence, there is a need for organized delivery of information/induction.

Table 4. Chi-square analysis of the students' knowledge specific to the tasks of a counselor

	<i>Right response</i>	<i>Wrong response</i>	<i>Total</i>
Observed	14	10	24
Expected	12	12	24
<i>Difference</i>	2	2	

Chi-square is equal to 0.67

As can be seen from Table 4, the obtained Chi-square value of 0.67 is not significant at 0.05 level of significant. It means the average score (14 points) of respondents regarding the tasks of the counselor is not an informed one. It means that the average score of respondent information on the tasks of the guidance officer is due to chance. Thus, it can be concluded that the students

don't have the necessary information on the services provided by the campus guidance counseling officers.

Table 5. Chi-square test of independence on the knowledge of students upon the counselor role with respect to gender as a variable

	<i>Sex</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Observed	12	16
Expected	13	13
<i>Difference</i>	1	3

Chi-square is equal to 0.77

The Table 5 value, Chi-square= 0.77 is insignificant even at 0.05 level of confidence. Thus, the hypothesis of independence is accepted. It means that knowledge of the task of the counselor has no relationship with sex difference. To make it clear, the score difference on the knowledge of the counselor role cannot be attributed to the gender factor alone. This implies that the gender office and other student support services have not brought the expected difference in the knowledge of students.

Table 6. Students perceptions of the services provided by the guidance office

Those with	<i>Proportion of students in each category</i>		
	<i>Always</i>	<i>Very seldom</i>	<i>Never</i>
Academic problems	50	10	40
Social & vocational problems	35	0	65
Personal problems	40	10	50
<i>Overall</i>	<i>41.67</i>	<i>6.67</i>	<i>51.66</i>

The above table shows that students' perception of the service offered by guidance counseling as a whole. It is clear that academic area is a little bit better than personal, vocational and social aspects (in terms of giving attention by those responsible individuals) as perceived by students. Overall, about 42 percent of the respondents considered the guidance counseling service always helpful in alleviating students' academic, vocational, social and personal problems. On the other hand, nearly 52 percent concluded that the services had never reduced or minimized their academic, vocational, social and personal troubles. The finding here is in agreement with the findings observed under Table 3 and 4. It can therefore be concluded that knowledge of the services, and the importance and dimensions of the guidance counseling sector, need to be brought to students' attention, and a special effort should be made to advocate for the usefulness of the sector.

Table 7. Students perceptions of the support staff services

	<i>Proportion of students in each category</i>		
	<i>Always</i>	<i>Very seldom</i>	<i>Never</i>
Support services:			
○ Clinic service	45	15	40
○ Clerical service	24	18	58
○ Security services	8	12	80
○ Dormitory services	56	10	34
○ Library services	68	12	20
<i>Overall</i>	<i>40.2</i>	<i>13.4</i>	<i>46.4</i>

From Table 7 it can be seen that the services offered by the library and dormitory support staff members are positively perceived. Clerical and security services are perceived negatively by nearly 70 percents of the respondents. In general, 40.2 percent of the respondents considered the guidance services as being always satisfactory and 13.4 percent said they had very seldom been offered services by the respective area. On the other hand, 46.4 percent of the total respondents said that they never get satisfactory guidance-related support services in the existing condition of the university. From this, it is quite obvious that orientation for the respective support service is high demand. It is advised that the services of guidance counseling should not be the responsibilities of instructors and university counselors alone, rather it has to be managed and delivered through a collective effort.

Table 8. Summary of the Score of Students Attitudes in Percentage

<i>Unfavorable Attitude</i>		<i>Indifferent Attitude</i>		<i>Favorable Attitude</i>	
<i>In No.</i>	<i>In %</i>	<i>In No.</i>	<i>In %</i>	<i>In No.</i>	<i>In %</i>
20	10	50	25	130	65

Table 8 clearly illustrates that 10 percent of the respondents reacted unfavorably, and 25 percent of them were found to have indifferent attitudes, toward the guidance services offered by instructors. The rest, 65 percent of the respondents, had favorable attitudes toward the counseling process delivered by academic staff members. On the other hand, the mean attitudes score of respondents seems to be inclined toward positive attitudes, which also indicates favorable attitudes by the majority of the respondents. The standard deviation of the total score of the attitudes of students was calculated to be 3.4. This indicates how the magnitude of the score of the respondents' spread in the distribution. Too much variation in attitudes toward the guidance service is not the trend of the research findings to hand.

Table 9. Summary of ANOVA with reference to sex and locality of the students' attitudes toward the guidance services offered by academic staff members

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Df.</i>	<i>F</i>
Sex	2-1=1	<1
Locality	2-1=1	6.453**
Interaction	1x1=1	<1
With in	N-4=196	
<i>Total</i>	<i>N-1=199</i>	

Table 9 illustrates that the F-value for sex is insignificant at 0.05 levels, and the F-value is significant for locality at the 95 percent confidence level. Similarly, F-value is not significant with respect to interaction (Sex X Locality). It can further be stated that there is no significant mean difference between male and female respondents regarding their attitudes toward the guidance services rendered by instructors. As a whole, one can understand that urban high school attendants have better attitudes than rural high school attendants. This could happen owing to the nature of urban schools that are more likely to be equipped with resources (human and material) than rural schools, including guidance counseling services. As a result, it is believed that the availability of such a center with the required resources may contribute much to the development of positive attitudes by those respondents toward guidance and counseling practices.

Table 10. Summary of ANOVA: On the students' attitudes toward the guidance services offered by academic staff members among high, average and low achievers.

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>
Between Group	k-1=2	16.294
Within	N-3=197	
<i>Total</i>	<i>N-1=199</i>	

Table 10 clearly portrays that there is a significant mean difference among average achievers, high achievers and low achievers with respect to attitudes score toward the guidance services offered by academic staff members. Along with this, the post-hoc Analysis of variance identified that high achievers have better attitudes score than average and low achievers. Moreover, from the result it can safely be concluded that better achievement in the academic sector that the students attain could be linked to the possession of favorable attitudes toward the guidance services offered by academic staff members. This means, good achievement in a given academic program could be attributed to taking advantage of the instructors' advice in the respective academic area, and be a

good condition for having favorable attitudes toward the guidance counseling centers.

Table 11. Summary of ANOVA of the students' knowledge and attitudes toward the guidance counseling services across faculties

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>
Between Groups	k-1=6	9.284
Within Groups	N-3=197	
<i>Total</i>	<i>N-1=199</i>	

From Table 11 it can be seen that F is significant at the 0.01 level. It means that the groups (faculties or colleges) vary significantly among themselves on students' knowledge and attitudes towards the services of guidance counseling. The post-hoc analysis of variance further differentiated the health faculty students as having better awareness, and more favorable attitudes, toward the guidance counseling activities. Using the personal experience of the researcher it can be suggested that this may be because the health faculty students were advantaged by having the opportunity to access a guidance officer in their faculty. It can also be connected to the students' opportunity to take some counseling courses in their respective academic study areas.

Results of open-ended items

An attempt has been made to categorize and summarize the respondents' reactions under the following two major headings.

1. Major problems of students during their study of the various academic training programs in the university

The core problems could be classified under the following headings:

a) On Conditions of Academic Services (general)

Many students were unhappy about the instructional methods employed by their academic instructors. The respondents claimed that they have no appropriate direction given by academic staff on academic matters. To this effect, they suggested that academic services in the university need to be improved in many aspects: adequacy and clarity of the types of academic services must be seriously considered. Access to academic information for students is inadequate. Academic support services for students are very limited and they are not all-inclusive to serve all university faculties or campuses.

b) On Conditions of Academic Services (specific to assessment and grading processes)

The lack of a smooth relationship between students and teachers usually results in unsatisfactory assessment. A poor grading system added to bias with the assessment, along with a lack of transparency and openness in the handling of students' grade complaints, is the main concerns of students, and requires special attention by the academic administration of the University. Students, after serious observation of the academic atmosphere, suggest that the teaching and learning process (and student-teacher relationships) focus on more practical aspects, rather than the theoretical, when dealing with academic assessment. Students added that most exams are hard and complicated, and that very little or no affirmative actions have been taken for female students by the instructors. Teachers should at least consider supporting and assisting female students to minimize the attrition rates. The academic support should encompass giving assignments and worksheets that encourage cooperative learning. Along with this, frequent quizzes and tests that would make the grading system more reliable and accurate, need to be planned and put into practice.

c) On Conditions of Administrative Services

Students responded that they experienced very poor relationships with the administrative staff, and with the academic staff. A rigid system of academic administration was experienced. There was sometimes excessive use of bureaucracy, with a lack of transparency, accountability and necessary politeness when dealing with students and subordinates. Demonstrating authority seemed to dominate administrative routines. The academic administration of the university worries more about, and gives more attention to exam schedules and progresses considers, and very little to the commencement of semester classes and monitoring students' progress. Students' participation in academic affairs is very limited and mostly they are alienated by their departments and faculties.

2. Suggestion on how to improve the guidance services

The service of guidance counseling needs to be accessible to all students, and led or coordinated by professional psychologists or professional counselors. Instructors should be sensitive and committed while students need services relating to academic problems. Students expressed the feeling that proper guidance counseling services are badly needed. They believed that to have committed guidance services the academic societies should think seriously about minimizing their economic orientation and magnify their professional

dedication. The administrative wing should strive to establish and/or strengthen the guidance counseling center in a sustainable manner. In general, guidance program should provide some lessons on dealing with exams, how to study, and how to adjust to campus life. Finally, students stressed that “we request the university to work hard toward the successful functioning of a guidance sector to get appropriate services on personal, academic and vocational affairs”.

DISCUSSION

The Chi-Square analysis indicates that students do not have adequate knowledge of the guidance counseling services in general, and the services offered by instructors and various university personnel in particular. The findings indicated that there is no significant difference in awareness regarding the services among the different grades and program levels of students. It means that whether a student is a new comer, or has stayed for three or more years, there is no significant difference in knowledge of the services offered by the guidance counseling sector. It is therefore strongly urged that the university students support services work hard in delivery of information regarding the services offered by the guidance counseling division. A discussion with the personnel in student support services indicated that circulation of a one page leaflet is a first major step they have taken. Though such an initiative may aid students to learn something about the services, it cannot guarantee adequate and complete information on academic, personal, and career selection problems. Furthermore, the need to appoint dedicated and capable counselors in sufficient number and quality should be seriously considered by university management bodies, as the guidance services are basic to sustaining quality on the different university training and education programs (Onyinyeowuamanam, 2005).

As a whole, students’ perceptions are that the present guidance counseling services did not alleviate their academic, vocational, social and personal problems (nearly 58 percent of survey respondents). However, a reasonable amount of respondents didn’t completely deny the academic support they get from some of their instructors. Studies showed that instructors’ role was crucial and needs to be undertaken in a more consolidated and sustainable fashion (Shaibu, 2004).

One of the most notable findings of the study under consideration was that students did not get the support they required from the non academic staff. It is quite obvious that extensive services in guidance counseling cannot be exclusively provided by instructors and an appointed counselor. It was suggested that an efficient guidance counseling services was the outcome of collective efforts (Seleshi, 1996).

The other focus of the current investigation is identifying whether students have favorable attitudes toward the guidance counseling services or not. The finding is positive. It confirmed that about 65 percents of the respondents have a favorable attitude. As can be seen from Table 9 above, those students whose background is urban (in their secondary education) significantly favor the services more than those whose high school background was rural. The finding does not deviate from expectations. This is because urban educational institutions, in most case, have appointed trained counselors. It can be expected that familiarity with the roles and tasks of the counselor would have an impact in developing positive attitudes towards, and recognition of the services by the students. In addition to this, high achievers were found to have favorable attitudes toward the guidance counseling services. This probably happens because these students with better academic records know the benefit of guidance counseling services more than lower and average academic achievers.

Last, but not least, it is the faculty of health students express higher satisfactory and have more positive attitudes than other faculty students regarding guidance counseling. The researcher using his personal observations, and collegial discussion, concluded that students who belong to this faculty have better orientation than students in other faculties or colleges. This is evident because there was one professional who has been appointed as a guidance counseling officer for the faculty health at Harar Campus. This may play a decisive role in creating better knowledge and developing positive attitudes toward the guidance services in such students.

CONCLUSION

This study was intended to examine the role of guidance counseling programs in enhancing quality in Ethiopian higher education institutions. In so doing, students' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes on the practices of guidance counseling at Haramaya University were carefully scrutinized. The researcher collected data through a questionnaire developed and validated by him. After a thorough analysis of the information procured through the tool from the respondents, the following major findings are established:

i) Students' Knowledge of guidance counseling

- The students do not have a much knowledge of the guidance counseling services presently offered by the educational institutions under consideration
- The kind of knowledge of the guidance counseling service is not dependent on the class year or level of education

- The students do not have knowledge of the services likely to be offered by the campus counselor(s).
- The students' knowledge regarding to the task of the counselor is independent of gender.

ii) Students perceptions of the guidance counseling

- About 42 percent of the respondents acknowledged that guidance counseling services are always helpful in minimizing or alleviating students' academic, vocational, social and personal problems. On the other hand, nearly 52 percent concluded that the current guidance counseling services have never reduced or minimized students' academic, vocational, social and personal stresses.
- Nearly all clerical and security services are perceived negatively by around 70 percent of the respondents. As a whole 40.2 percent of the respondents considered the support services as being always satisfactory, and 13.4 percent said they very seldom get services from the program. On the other hand, 46.4 percent of the total respondents held that they have never been offered satisfactory guidance and related support services in their study at the university.

iii) Students attitudes toward guidance counseling

- About 65 percent of the respondents have favorable attitudes toward the guidance counseling practices of academic staff
- There is no significant difference between male and female respondents in their attitudes toward the guidance services rendered by instructors. As a whole, students from urban high schools have more positive attitudes than students from rural high schools.
- Analysis of variance indicates that high achievers have more positive attitudes towards guidance counseling than average and low achievers.
- The Health Faculty Students are significantly more positive than other students in their awareness of, and attitudes towards, the guidance counseling services.

Overall, it can safely be concluded that there is no well-organized student counseling system in the universities investigated. It is observed that the universities are lacking an all-inclusive plan for giving direction to student services across their campuses. There is also an absence of a well-organized supervisory body to deal with such factors as proper usage of the services,

following up reports and special surveys of student guidance counseling practices. Moreover, equitable distribution of services across the university's campuses is a challenge; there is evidence that students at the different campuses are treated unevenly in terms of the level of counseling support. Accordingly, the capacity of the service to maintain and enhance the quality of university education and training is in doubt.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICES

The expectations of the guidance counseling services expressed by the research participants could be seen from the following perspectives:

- A lack of information about the types of services offered by the guidance program. This suggests the need for more promotional activities.
- The need to have more counselors in university campuses to conduct more individual counseling and a greater number of interventions with students' problems.
- Little or no attention being paid by the management bodies to the guidance counseling sector. In future, it is suggested that management should work hard to strengthen the guidance counseling sector.
- No proper planning, implementation and follow up of the current guidance counseling practices. Hence, there is a strong need to work hard at rectifying the above problems.
- The need for greater involvement of instructors and other personnel in guidance counseling is strongly suggested.

In an attempt to establish, promote, and evaluate guidance counseling programs, a given academic institution must have a guidance plan that encompasses various programs deemed necessary and appropriate for a particular system. Beside the strategic plan that the institution could have, a comprehensive plan for offering guidance services to students needs to be designed. It is believed that the counselor is responsible for implementing the guidance plan. If that plan is no longer current, the guidance officer must develop an appropriate written institutional-based plan with relevant competencies based on student needs. The institutional-based guidance plan should be broad enough to cover the various procedures available to the university guidance officer and be consistent with the policies of the institution and the system. The institutional-based plan may include a needs assessment, goals, objectives, activities, and evaluation procedures. Effective procedures for developing a plan could include the following:

- Seek input and gather data from students, academic staff and support staff in assessing student needs.
- Gather institutional-based data to determine guidance counseling requirements in the institution.
- Gather data using questionnaires; from student needs as expressed to counselors, to instructors, and from input of professional association meetings, community representatives, faculty discussions, and guidance advisory committees.
- Develop goals (strategic directions and objectives) related to individual needs.
- Specify steps to work with support personnel in the institution and community.
- Specify academic and vocational guidance in the course of training through collaboration with instructors (Ponsford & Lapadat, 2001).

The guidance counseling officer should also implement an individual plan of action for each academic year that is related to the goals and objectives of the institutional plan. The individual plan may be based on either previously determined institutional-based needs or emergent needs. The focus should be on the greatest identified needs and the most effective and efficient ways to meet those needs. Effective practices to develop and implement an individual plan may include the following:

- Specify the kind and magnitude of counseling required for students.
- Specify a program of group counseling for students at risk.
- Specify a program to assist female university students.
- Specify a program to help talented and gifted students.
- Specify a program of planned individual counseling.
- Conducts specified tasks as planned and make revisions as necessary.
- Adhere, as much as possible, to planned activities.
- Revise the format of the guidance plan to fit the identified need.
- Present information about the results of individual or institution-based guidance plans to students, staff, parents, and the community, where appropriate.

- Utilize effectively the university newsletter to disseminate information about the guidance services being offered.
- Distribute information sheets to students, teachers, and other support staff.

Evaluate the general activities and status of the guidance services (Herr & Cramer, 1986)

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