

## *Original Paper*

# School-based Psychosocial Support: Asset-based Approach for Positioning Guidance and Counselling as a Core Component

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### **Abstract**

*The necessity for school-based psychosocial support (SBPSS) provision has become a fundamental issue in global education systems. However, for many schools in Lesotho, and in other Sub-Saharan countries, there seem to be no clarity on the position of guidance and counselling (GC) in school psychosocial support (PSS) undertakings. This paper considers G/C as an essential component of psychosocial support provision in schools, and argues that G/C should be well positioned so that it becomes the core component of PSS activities. The paper intends to address issues raised by international research that against the backdrop of ever increasing complex societal challenges that impact negatively on school going population and school life in general, there is need strengthen G/C as part of PSS activities. The interplay of the various challenges often makes the adverse experiences more complex, subsequently causing adjustment disorders among students. Underpinned by asset-based approach and relational leadership theory, this study employed qualitative semi-structured questionnaires, online free attitude interviews and focus group discussions to explore teachers' perspectives on possibilities for positioning GC as the core component of SBPSS. This study uncovered various factors contributing to undecided position of GC. The study concluded that schools need to tap into asset-based approach to strategically position GC in SBPSS undertakings.*

### **Keywords**

*guidance and counselling, component, psychosocial support, asset-based, approach*

## **1. Introduction**

The necessity for school-based psychosocial support (SBPSS) provision has become a fundamental issue in global education systems. Research shows that the ever increasing complex societal challenges

impact negatively on school going population, and school life in general (Mushaandja et al., 2014; Mahlomaholo, 2012; Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016; Boitt, 2016). Many school going children are faced with a diverse range of adverse experiences instigated by challenges in societies (Mahlomaholo, 2012; Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016). Ocansey and Gyimah (2016) state that “in this fast changing world, pupils all over the world have developed severe social and psychological needs that affect their interactions with others and subsequently, the achievement of their life goals”. Generally, huge numbers of school going population are said to increasingly show signs of declined emotional well-being, manifesting in problematic behavioural patterns in many cases. Some of the societal challenges as pointed out by research include changing family structures, unemployment, death of parents, poverty, abuse, neglect, broken families, displacement and diseases (Mahlomaholo, 2012; Chirran, 2014; Heltne et al., 2020). Heltne et al. (2020) explain that the interplay of all these factors often makes the adverse experiences more complex, subsequently causing adjustment disorders among children and youth. They further indicate that adjustment disorders manifest in fear, depression, sadness, aggression, social withdrawal, reduced motivation for education, a lack of concentration, dropping out of schools, and general declined well-being (Heltne et al., 2020; Nasilumbi et al., 2016). This situation calls for ministries of education and school systems to mobilize all possible resources and assets to collectively create learning environments that are responsive to these threats if we are to achieve the sustainable development. Cognizance of the need to take action, several ministries of education have advocated for strengthened guidance and counselling (GC) service provision as part of school-based psychosocial support (SBPSS) undertakings. It has however been established by research that the current situation of GC in many countries, particularly in Africa does not promise to bring any positive change. Hence, this study aimed at exploring teachers’ perspectives on possibilities for changing the current status of GC, towards enhancing it and positioning it as a core component for SBPSS.

## **2. Literature Review**

The study followed narrative literature review. Reviewed literature stress that GC is an indispensable component of education that cannot be continuously overlooked (Moeti, 2016; Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016; and Egbo, 2015). In addition, GC is generally considered as the educational support service that assist all learners to participate in school activities (Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016). It is as an educational tool that shapes the orientation in a learner from negative ideas that are planted in them by their peers and other people in their environment (Moeti, 2016). This implies that through GC, learners get proper adjustment guide that could help come in terms with reality and adjust to the existing situations.

### *2.1 Guidance and Counselling Component in Psychosocial Support Activities*

REPSSI (2014, p. 5) defines psychosocial support (PSS) as “a continuum of love, care and protection that enhances the cognitive, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of a person and strengthens their social and cultural connectedness”. In schools, it is regarded as “both the day-to-day support needed by all learners for them to grow and develop healthily” (REPSSI, 2014, p. 5). Moreover, an International

network for education in emergencies (INEE) (2016) states that PSS refers to the actions that address both the social and psychological needs of individuals, families and communities. In this paper PSS is considered as a type of intervention or support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial wellbeing, or to prevent or treat mental disorders, often focusing on human capacity and an enabling environment (Heltne et al., 2020).

Various researchers generally believe that positioning GC as a core component of PSS is another approach to respond to both psychological and social variables of psychosocial needs (UNICEF, 2003; Heltne et al., 2020; Mushandjaa et al., 2014; MoET, 2005; UNICEF, 2009). That is GC can help students overcome their emotional problems and change maladjusted behaviours, while promoting learners' positive inter personal relationships with family, community and friends. Moeti (2016); Ocansey and Gyimah (2016) and Egbo (2015) concur that GC can assist people with self-awareness, understanding their problems, and how to cope with them. Moreover, UNICEF (2003) asserts that GC has a way of dealing with psychosocial and emotional problems of children in difficult circumstances by addressing their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. In this article GC is regarded as an essential component that supports PSS standards of care and intention to meet ongoing emotional, social and spiritual needs of students as they cope with life's challenges (Mattingly 2020). The authors of this article support literature that shows that through well positioned GC schools and teachers can act as protective resources for care and support (Ebersohn et al., 2015). Ebersohn et al. (2015) argue that teachers' positive adaptation places them in a better position to provide psychosocial support and care. Likewise, UNICEF (2003) states that teachers are in an ideal position to support children with social and emotional challenges since they have extensive experience of children's development and ability to identify those who experience difficulties.

In order to address psychosocial well-being in schools, various ministries of education mandated schools to strengthen GC (MoET, 2005; Gatua et al., 2015; Idat et al., 2017; Mushaandja et al., 2013). Several reports from different countries such as Japan, Bosnia, Croatia, Palestine and Kosovo show that teachers are trained in psychosocial support provision (UNESCO, 2015). Teachers are trained to ensure supportive relationships that address psychological and emotional problems of learners. For instance, a training handbook on psychosocial support prepared by UNICEF (2003) shows that one of the objectives of the training is to ensure that teachers acquire basic skills needed for counselling, and understand the steps, principles, and process of psychosocial counselling. Nonetheless, it is evident from the reviewed literature that in some parts of the world (particularly the Sub-Saharan region, where Lesotho is situated) school counselling service is still negligible compared to other educational services (Idat et al., 2017; Mushaandja et al., 2013; Mosia, 2015).

## *2.2 Context of the Study*

There is small but growing literature base addressing SBPSS in Lesotho. This study draws from reports by international organisations and a few research studies addressing the vulnerability of the school-going population in Lesotho. For instance, UNICEF Annual Report (2017) reports that Lesotho

remain one of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, with unemployment rate of 33 per cent among young people. The report also shows that the country had the second highest HIV prevalence in the world (25 per cent) with new infections among females aged 15-19. This contributes to increased populations of orphans and vulnerable children. Another report by USAID (2013) show that the orphans and vulnerable children are faced with diverse socio-economic challenges which call for PSS interventions. The Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2005, p. 16) also shows that “in Lesotho, as is the case in most African countries, girls and boys of school-going age have not been spared from multiple cases of emerging and chronic social problems that are likely to prevent them from realizing full potential in life”. Given these, the MoET drafted the School Health Policy of Lesotho of 2005. In this policy draft, the Ministry emphasized its intention to expand and strengthen GC services in schools.

It is appropriate to highlight that for decades, Lesotho teacher training institutions attempted to support the expansion of GC services in schools. This is evidenced by the integration of psychology-based courses such as “Psychology for Counselling”, “Educational Psychology/ Guidance and Counselling” and “Counselling Psychology Theory and Practice” in teacher training programmes (National University of Lesotho, 2006; Mosia, 2015; Lephoto, 2019). The purpose is to equip teachers with basic counselling skills so that they can identify troubled learners and provide necessary support.

The authors of this article have noted however that while the MoET embraces the role of teachers in providing GC to learners (MoET, 2005), there are some contradictions in some of its policies. For instance, while the School Health Policy Draft (2005) highlights that teachers have the duty to provide GC to learners, the policy paradoxically states that GC services should be left in the hands of psychologists, social workers and guidance counsellors (MoET, 2005). The paradox is that none of these professionals were ever placed to work closely with schools. This article considers this as an indication of application of needs-based approaches that promote dependence from outside expertise ignoring available assets, skills and talents within schools. This attitude leaves the schools with a negative view of themselves as incapable of providing GC to students.

### **3. Aim of the Study, Objectives and Research Questions**

This paper aimed to explore teachers’ perspectives on the possibilities for positioning GC as a core component for school-based psychosocial support (SBPSS). The findings of the enquiry will inform policy and the development of strategies for positioning GC as a core component for school-based psychosocial support activities. In addition, the findings may inform the MoET, teacher training institutions and principals on the perceptions of teachers on the possibilities for purposeful positioning of GC as a core component for SBPSS. Apart from that, the study aimed at influencing schools to tap into asset-based approach and other collectivistic and participatory approaches as essential ingredients for enhancing GC, and purposively position it as a core component for school-based psychosocial support undertakings. Specific objectives in this study are:

- To establish the position of GC in SBPSS undertakings.
- To explore teachers' perspectives of enablers for strategic positioning of GC in PSS undertakings.

The following research questions underpin this study.

- What is the current position of GC in PSS activities in Lesotho schools?
- What enablers are necessary for strategic positioning of GC in PSS undertakings in Lesotho schools?

#### **4. Theoretical Underpinnings**

This study is grounded in an eclectic mix of Asset-based (AB), Flocking Together (FT) and Relational leadership (RL) theories. These theories support the general agreement that GC should be a shared responsibility of all school staff members (Boitt, 2016; McIntosh, 2013; Nzeleni, 2015). In addition, they support the assumption that care and support strategies draw on what is available collectively, including social, cultural, spiritual, natural and financial resources (Ebersohn et al., 2014). Boitt's (2016) shares the same sentiments in his argument that no matter how committed and competent counsellors may be, they cannot provide effective GC services without the co-operation of all the stakeholders. This suggests that GC provision needs to be based on the principle that care and support comes with a caveat to use resources in a way to gradually become less dependent on assistance (Ebersohn et al., 2014). In this study, the requirement for an asset-based approach is based on the author's belief that there is a need to shift from commonly adopted needs-based approaches that focus on problems than available strengths (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006; Ebersohn et al., 2015; Myende, 2015) while also promoting dependency. The intention is to influence the change of mind set that schools cannot manage to develop GC programmes without the presence of psychologists and social workers in schools. The problem is more often, schools principals and teachers pay attention to this problem ignoring the fact that teachers' basic knowledge and skills for counselling can be harmonized and utilized to ensure that learners continuously get GC support. Ebersohn and Eloff (2006) argue that needs-based approaches create mental maps of communities that encourage its members to think about themselves as fundamentally deficient and powerless victims of their circumstances.

The asset-based approach aims at empowering those involved, such as teachers, learners, parents and other members of staff. In addition, it focuses on available assets, strengths, resources, capacities and skills (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006; Ebersohn et al., 2015). Moreover, it supports that teachers' basic GC knowledge and skills gained during their training can be harmonized and utilized such that each school can develop its approach to GC provision. Omodan et al. (2019) state that the fundamental principle of the asset-based approach is that all communities (including schools) are asset rich and can use this to survive. Likewise, Garoutte and McCarthy (2014) argue that all communities have the ability to create sustainable development from within, without external interference. Ebersohn and Eloff (2006) however, argue that this does not deny the fact that communities have problems and deficiencies, but it is better to start from what the community has rather than what it does not have. Schools, as learning

communities need to adopt this mind-set despite their deficiencies. In fact, Ebersohn et al. (2015, p. 5) state it clearly that “in line with psychosocial support and care, the fundamental principles of the asset-based approach include ownership and responsibility, practical solutions, a caring and supportive environment, building individuals’ strengths, and ennoblement, together with collaboration and the establishment of partnerships and networks”.

The theory of Flocking together is an indigenous psychology theory of resilience that developed by Liesel Ebersohn. In this theory, Pukepuke (2019) shows that Ebersohn has harnessed the African principles of collectivism and reciprocity-of-care held within the concept of Ubuntu. The intention was to highlight indigenous resilience responses to adversity. In this article, flocking together and asset-based approach under relational leadership are considered as the best way to promote resilience practices by schools, and as a response to the adversities specific to African experience (Pukepuke, 2019). Flocking as a theoretical concept is considered as a relational interdependent adaptive response to the destitutions experienced by African communities (Pukepuke, 2019) particularly schools in marginalised backgrounds. Ebersohn (2020) argues that in Africa, where large-scale adversity is normative, interdependent resilience mechanisms such as flocking responses denotes targeted joint resource distribution to counter extreme adversity. Flocking as a social support pathway encourages and support positive education outcomes. It encourages and motivates teachers to work collaboratively with parents to provide social and psychological support in different ways to respond to learners’ varying needs. Above all, flocking promotes teacher-led GC practice that has potential to impact positively on health and wellbeing outcomes. In addition, teachers can use social connectedness to link with officials who can assist in different ways.

Relational leadership theory supports collaboration, partnership and networks necessary for identifying available assets and strengths within schools. Its components of inclusive, purpose, empowerment, ethics and process (Komvies, 2007; Burns et al., 2015, Gittell & Douglass, 2012) are considered in this article as guiding principles in efforts to properly position GC as core component for SBPSS. Gittell and Douglass (2012, p. 720) state that RL is “a reciprocal interrelationship between groups of people to make sense of the situation, to determine what is to be done and how to do it”. The inclusive component fosters creation of cognitive and social spaces for collective construction and re-construction of knowledge necessary for positioning of GC. RL suggests inclusive and collaborative practices (Komvies, 2007) that put everyone involved at the centre. Its aim is to improve the human condition as it raises all participants to levels at which they can become effective leaders through the sharing of skills, information and experience (Komvies, 2007).

## **5. Methodology**

This study employed qualitative approach to explore teachers’ perspectives on possibilities for positioning GC as a core component for SBPSS. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed the researchers to study the problem and to make sense of, or to interpret it in terms of

meanings participants bring to them (Mertens 2005). The paper aimed at understanding “social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives” (Welman et al., 2005, p. 191) of teachers since they are naturally involved in PSS activities in schools. In other words, this approach was used so that the understanding of constructs held by people in the context of research is well interpreted for a better understanding of meanings they attach to the situation of GC in their schools and/or the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, the qualitative approach helped the researchers to engage in discussions and dialogue with selected participants, where they were able to enquire for in-depth explanations and descriptions required for better understanding of the phenomenon (Moeti, 2016).

### *5.1 Participants and Recruitment Procedure*

The study adopted a purposive selection of participants. All the 18 participants are professional teachers. Eight of them have graduated for in-service B.Ed Honours in Educational psychology the previous academic year (2019/2020), while ten of them are in their final academic year (2020/2021) in the same programme at one teacher training institution in Lesotho. Students who enrol in this programme have to register for “Counselling Psychology, Theory and practice” as a compulsory course. The course is intended to build on their basic counselling skills acquired from undergraduate programme (B.Ed) where it is mandatory to register for “Introduction to guidance and counselling” course. The selection of the participants was on the basis that they all had more than five years of teaching experience. Hence the researchers believed that the participants had the necessary information concerning the provision of PSS in schools, particularly the position of G/C in PSS activities. The other reason for the selection of the afore mentioned groups of teachers was the assumption that by virtue of their training in “Counselling Psychology, theory and practice” in postgraduate programme, they are more knowledgeable in the subject under study, thus well positioned to provide descriptions and explanations required to respond meaningfully to the questions that guided the study. Phone calls and online (whatsapp groups) were used to invite the selected participants. A total of 18 out of 28 invited teachers voluntarily participated in the study. The study adopted online data generation process, using phone calls, whatsapp, email and Google meet (Lefever et al., 2007).

Qualitative semi-structured questionnaires, telephone free attitude interviews and Google meet focus groups discussions (FGDs) were used to gather data. Whatsapp and email were used to distribute the questionnaires to the participants, and to receive the answered questionnaires. Google meet was used for conducting two focus group discussions which lasted for one hour thirty minutes each. Tates et al. (2009) support that online focus group methodology is a feasible tool for generating qualitative data, and may be offer new opportunities to collect data in other hard-to-include populations. The advantage of using online group discussions as further argued by Tates et al. (2009) is that it gives participants an opportunity to articulate their experiences and views in a way they might not have done in a traditional group discussion. Whatsapp groups were also used to agree on the suitable time for everybody to participate in FGDs. Prompts were used to trigger and sustain dialogue during FGDs. Rabiee (2004) states that the aim of focus groups is to understand and explain the meanings, beliefs, and cultures that

influence the feelings, attitudes and behaviour of individuals. In order to capture data, the first author used note taking. There were also recordings which were transcribed. Both Sesotho and English languages were used during data generation process. In order to curb language barriers to freely express oneself the participants were told that they were free to respond either in any of the two languages.

### *5.2 Ethical Issues*

Ethical considerations are important around conducting the research (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The researcher sought for informed consent to participate in the study from the participants. The intention to undertake the research was thoroughly explained to the participants so that informed consent become the cornerstone of this research study (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). In addition, data generation processes to be used were explained to participants so that they were fully informed of what will be asked of them, and how the data would be used. In addition, the researchers explained to participants that participation was voluntary, and the participants were free to withdraw whenever they felt like (Kaewkungwal & Adams, 2019). The participants were assured that their identity will be kept confidential. The researcher sought for informed consent verbally from the participants (Moeti, 2016). No one was coerced to participate.

### *5.3 Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis was used to examine data and to gain meaningful comprehension of participants' perspectives. The researchers examined all the data generated to identify patterns within the data. Thematic analysis is generally considered as a useful method of analysing qualitative data that offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach (Nowell, Norris, & White, 2017). In addition, thematic analysis is regarded as a valuable method for examining the content of responses from data collected from open-ended survey questions, focus group discussions, or interviews (SAGE research methods datasets, 2019). Since the researchers were determined to understand the phenomenon under inquiry from the participants' perspectives, knowledge, experiences and values, thematic analysis allowed them to closely examine the generated data to identify, analyse, organise, describe and report themes (topics, thoughts and patterns of meaning) found within data set (Nowell et al., 2017; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researchers were conscious that there are no fast rules about what makes a theme (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). They decided to flexibly (Nowell et al., 2017) follow the most common Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step approach to data analysis (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). They started by familiarising themselves with data (which involved written texts, notes and recordings, which were first transcribed, reading through the transcripts) and then generated codes using pens and highlighters. Each code described the feelings and perspectives expressed in a particular part of the text. The codes allowed the researcher to gain a condensed overview of the main themes and common connotations that frequently appeared in the data (Caufield, 2019). After that, the patterns were identified and organised into themes. These themes were reviewed to check that they accurately represent the generated data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The themes were then defined and named so that writing up could become easier. Thematic analysis helped the researcher to summarise key features of



generated data, helping her to produce a clear and organised final report (Nowell et al., 2017).

## 6. Findings

The thematic analysis of generated data yielded three main themes under which subthemes emerged. The themes are presented in the following sections.

### 6.1 The Current Focus of PSS

The findings revealed that the psychosocial support undertakings focus more on provision of material needs. Many participants commented that vulnerable learners in their schools are usually supported by providing them with food, books and uniform. Some teachers pointed out that even in the cases where schools get support from the community members and NGOs, the support is the same. The following comments reveal participants' observations, feelings and opinions with regard to the situation of G/C in PSS activities:

*MoET usually requests schools to submit lists of vulnerable students so that they can be supported. The same lists are often used by the schools to identify students who are vulnerable. Support from both the ministry and schools focuses on providing for material needs. GC is not given much attention. Usually teachers volunteer to provide GC in their own way whenever they find it necessary.*

*It is true that our students are supported with school needs, but that is not enough. There are some who look emotionally troubled. GC would be of great help.*

Analysis of the above assertions reveals that GC is not yet strategically positioned as a core component of PSS. Teachers are of the opinion that on top of meeting students' material needs, there should be GC provision that take care of emotionally troubled learners.

One teacher expressed her view of the need for organised GC service provision by sharing her experience with learners in difficult situation:

*Learners differ. Some seem to feel very ashamed to accept whatever that is given to them. I remember one small boy in my class refusing to accept a pair of school shoes that I bought for him. I had discovered that for some time he wore almost finished pair of shoes that hardly covered his toes. It is not common for learners in our school to wear shoes in that state unless there are serious financial constraints. In another incident, one girl accepted a school shirt I bought for her, but she continued to wear a very old torn shirt. The problem is she did not seem to be comfortable with the shirt as she would usually wear her school jersey even when it was extremely hot. I think it is necessary for schools to find a way of developing organised GC provision so as to address learners' thoughts and feelings in a supportive manner.*

The above statement further reveal teachers' common point of view that it is not enough to focus mainly on providing learners with material needs. Some teachers explained that issues pertaining to GC are not given the necessary attention by the school administrators. This implies that teachers' basic GC skills are underutilized. It is also evident that teachers value GC and embrace it as an essential

component of SBPSS. The results also uncovered several drawbacks that obstruct positioning of GC as a core component of PSS.

### 6.2 Drawbacks Seeming to Obstruct The Proper Positioning of GC in PSS

The findings show that despite teachers' support for positioning GC as a fundamental component of PSS, they are aware of several drawbacks that obstruct proper positioning of GC. The results yielded the following drawbacks:

#### 6.2.1 Lack of Collective Responsibility

Almost all participating teachers pointed to lack of collective responsibility as the major problem obstructing efficient utilization of teachers' basic GC knowledge and skills. They hold that GC provision needs collaborative efforts from principals, teachers, parents and students so that proper planning and purpose are achieved. The problem of lack of collective responsibility is not unique to the findings of this study. Many studies done in Sub-saharan countries show that often teacher counsellors work in isolation. Participating teachers also mentioned that schools need to work closely with the MoET and teacher training institutions for the sake of ensuring common understanding about what GC in PSS should involve. The following comments reveal participants perspectives:

*For all the years that I have served as a teacher, I do not remember MoET working closely with schools to support and facilitate development of purposeful GC programmes...when PSS workshops are held, only few selected teachers attend, and there is hardly a follow up on how schools should put into practice what is learned from such workshops.*

Another teacher supported:

*It is the same case with our teacher training institutions...I have never heard of a school working collaboratively with GC and Psychology for counselling lecturers to support teachers on how to practice GC in their different contexts. In my school we usually talk informally about the need to invite GC lecturers to guide us on how we can integrate GC in our school curriculum.*

It is evident from the above statements that participating teachers consider lack of collective responsibility as a challenge hampering proper positioning of GC. During the focus group discussions with BEd Honours students, they emphasized the need for parents and teachers to work collaboratively for the sake of shared understanding with regard to children' psychosocial needs and support. One teacher stated:

*It is important that parents are involved in PSS deliberations. Organised teacher-parent associations can help schools to develop their own programmes that are responsive to the needs of schools, parents and learners. I think the tendency of teachers and parents blaming one another, when things do not go well with learners can come to an end.*

Continuing with the discussions, another teacher shared her experience and thoughts in this way:

*I think the problem lies with schools' leadership. I have seen a situation where the Principal literally discourages collaboration. The Principal would talk openly to students and teachers during the morning assembly that GC provision is the responsibility of one particular*

*teacher...students should consult that particular teacher only when they have problems.*

Analysis of the above statements reveal teachers' belief that collaboration is the pillar for purposeful positioning of GC. Also, it is evident that some teachers consider strong leadership as the main pillar for purposeful GC practices. In fact, some participants believe that lack of collective responsibility impedes opportunities knowledge sharing and empowerment.

#### 6.2.2 Lack of Shared Understanding and Sense Making of What School GC Provision Should Involve

Many participants agreed that teachers usually have different views about what GC service provision should involve. They believe this contributes to lack of purposefulness and proper positioning of GC. The following assertions depict some of the teachers' observations and thoughts concerning shared understanding.

*Some believe that teachers have what it takes to provide counselling to students, while others believe that counselling need to be provided by a professional counsellor. We never make an effort to agree on one thing.*

Another teacher stated her opinion in this way:

*I think we have learned a lot about GC during our training. The problem is we never sit together as staff members to discuss how we can make use of our knowledge to develop our own programmes that suits our context.*

The above assertions indicate teachers' awareness of the significance of shared understanding of what GC provision should involve. They also reveal that teachers consider communication as a facilitative element in ensuring common understanding and purposefulness in GC initiatives. It is also evident that the participants have differing views about teachers' aptitudes for providing GC to learners. Lack of shared understanding as a problem in GC implementation is well documented (Chabela, 2010; Reavie, 2015). Mushaandja et al. (2013) argue that where there is lack of shared understanding and vision, teacher counsellors are in a quandary about which part of GC is more essential to meet national educational goals.

#### 6.2.3 Lack of Enabling GC Leadership

Participants showed principals usually fail to show strong support for teachers' efforts to provide GC to learners. In their view this is discouraging. This finding validates the findings of the previous studies which show that lack of support for teacher counsellors is one of the factors that hinder efficient GC activities (McIntonch, 2013; Boitt, 2018). This is revealed in the succeeding statements:

*I am not sure whether it is because of lack of interest or something else. What I have noticed is that principals do not bother to offer selected teacher counsellors and volunteers the necessary support. Selected teachers usually work in isolation. In some cases they are supported by volunteering teachers. I have noticed this in two schools that I worked at for more than four years, plus the fifth one where I did my teaching practice*

The other teacher attested:

*I was once told at the beginning of the year that I was responsible for GC activities because my work load is low. For the entire year I was not sure of what to do. I depended on the teacher who was responsible for GC activities for the past three years. I also sought advice from two other teachers who were very keen to support me on how to handle certain things.*

The above comments indicate that teachers have a feeling that teacher counsellors are not adequately supported to run meaningful and purposeful GC activities. In some cases they are not even clear of what is expected of them. It is however noted by the researcher that some teachers can trust and rely on other teachers who seem interested and more knowledgeable in GC matters for support. The researcher could deduce from teachers' assertions that selection of teacher counsellors is not relational since there is failure to continuously support them.

### *6.3 Perceived Enablers for Positioning GC as SBPSS Core Component*

Data analysis revealed teachers' perceived enablers for positioning of GC.

In terms of teamwork and inclusivity, participants emphasized the need for team approach. Several of them share the same view that teamwork is vital for promoting the sharing of knowledge and perspectives that might be necessary for common understanding and shared goals. The other shared perspective is that teamwork facilitates continuous construction of knowledge that may be necessary as more challenges emerge. Another issue raised was that teamwork can enhance coordinated communication.

*Teamwork is necessary because it will allow teachers to share knowledge and idea concerning GC practice. It means we can learn from one another.*

Another teacher said:

*I also think it is easier to communicate about what the school wants and aims to achieve when people work as a team.*

From the preceding statements, we could deduct that participants understand that their counselling skills can be efficiently utilized when there is team approach work. Research also attest to this (McIntonch, 2013; Boitt, 2016).

Stakeholders' commitment as another enabler was emphasized by almost all participants. They hold that the success of properly positioning GC depends on commitment by schools administration, teachers, parents, learners and other pertinent stakeholders. In their view commitment can help schools to reach the shared goals. Some of them highlighted that commitment can allow individuals to freely and willingly utilize their talent to support collectively owned plan and mission.

The participants were also emphatic when talking about empowerment as another enabler for positioning GC. They perceive empowerment as the condition in schools that involves creating a school climate that encourages all members of the school and parents to recognise that they have a right and responsibility to take ownership of the plan to appropriately position GC in PSS. This view is expressed in the statements below:

*Positive changes in GC require empowerment for all people that are involved. For example, teachers need to feel that they are valued as important people to contribute to the success of GC. They should be involved from the onset so that it becomes easier for them to understand their roles.*

Another teacher supported:

*This is important. It does not feel good to be told to implement something that you were never part of its plan and decision making, particularly when it concerns your day-to-day work.*

Our findings show that almost the participants share similar views as far as empowerment is concerned. Analysis of some of the statements reveals that teachers also recognise the value of strong school leadership in ensuring empowerment of those involved in mission for positive change such as the proper positioning of GC. In this context, empowerment may also imply that teachers' thoughts and opinions are accommodated, and teachers are encouraged and permitted to lead in ways that motivate them.

Participants were particularly articulate about the need for strong school leadership. They described strong leadership as that which values and focus on building positive relationships. They argued that positives relationships are essential conditions for successful teamwork and inclusion of multiple knowledge systems necessary to inform and guide context responsive GC undertakings. Komvies (2007) suggests that such relationships should be built on trust, respect and interdependence. In addition, they pointed out that positive relationships serve as external motivators for commitment by those involved.

## **7. Discussions**

The discussion section of this paper is presented underneath according to the findings under identified themes.

### *7.1 The Current Focus of PSS*

Participants' responses indicate that currently PSS activities focus on provision of material needs. All the participants agree that although GC is generally regarded as an essential component for PSS, it has never been strategically and purposively positioned as a core element of PSS activities. The admission by all the participants that GC practice is very casual and sporadic indicate that available resources in schools such as teachers' basic counselling skills are not coordinated and utilized as part PSS activities. This also indicates many learners in need of GC service are not provided such opportunity. Consequently, the psychological variable of psychosocial well-being is left unattended to. This finding was confirmed by Mosia and Lephoto (2014) who revealed that GC practice in Lesotho schools is random, with no clear direction and shared purpose. In another study Mosia (2015) revealed that the MoET first piloted the GC syllabus in a few high schools in 2002 but never followed to be implemented by all schools. Mosia argues that the education system in Lesotho does not proactively equip learners with life skills to weather day-to-day challenges; instead teachers reactively address

learners' problems as they emerge. It was also revealed by this study that even though Lesotho teacher training institutions equip teacher trainees with basic counselling skills there is never a follow up, and support on how these skills can be utilized through well planned, purposeful GC activities. Consequently, selected teacher counsellors and volunteers often work isolation and ultimately feel discouraged to continue organising GC activities.

### *7.2 Seeming Drawbacks Obstructing the Proper Positioning of GC in PSS*

Almost all participants pointed to lack of strong leadership for PSS activities as one of the drawbacks and blockade for proper positioning of GC. Participants' comments revealed that although in many schools certain teachers are usually selected to take be responsible for the running of GC activities, there is never clear vision, purpose and goals. Consequently GC activities become inconsistent and fail to sustain. Participants appeared to perceive this as an indication of feeble PSS leadership. Lack of policy to guide PSS provision, particularly GC implementation was uncovered as another contributing factor to inconsistencies and lack of direction.

Although MoET continuously talks about the need to strengthen GC provision in schools (MoET, 2005; MoET, 2011) the findings of this study show that up to this far, MoET has not managed to support schools in developing structured GC programmes. Participants pointed out that in rare cases workshops are held for teachers on issues of PSS. In relation to such workshops, participants concurred there is a hardly follow up to assess and support the application of newly acquired skills. Subsequently, the situation of haphazard, inefficient and inconsistent GC and probably other PSS activities remains the same.

Generated data on factors contributing to underutilization of GC point to lack of team work, lack of shared understanding of what GC provision should entail and necessity for enabling leadership. For example, teachers mentioned that those selected to be responsible for GC activities usually work alone without clear support from administration and fellow teachers. This corroborates the findings of the previous research done in Lesotho and other countries (Boitt, 2016; Chabela, 2010). It is worth noting that due to the nature of this study, reports on GC activities in Lesotho may not apply to all schools. Nonetheless, a substantial number of teachers from different parts of the country reported similar experiences and perceptions in relation to GC undertakings in schools.

Contrary to the view that GC should be the responsibility of all staff members working collaboratively with learners and parents (Nzeleni, 2015; Low et al., 2013), the findings of this study, and other studies carried in Lesotho (Lephoto, 2019; Chabela, 2010) show that lack of collective responsibility has a history of blockading proper positioning GC initiatives and other PSS initiatives such as life skills education and sexuality based education. In this matter, Dixon et al. (2008) state clearly that it is imperative for school counsellors, teachers, administrators, librarians, students, parents and the community at all levels to work collaboratively to empower all students academically, socially, psychologically, and in career planning.

The findings on lack of shared understanding and lack of support for teacher counsellors corroborate the reviewed literature and the previous research findings by several scholars (Boitt, 2016, George, 2014; Nzeleni 2015; Mushandjaa et al., 2013; McIntonch 2013). To illustrate this, one teacher gave an account of her experience where she was selected to be responsible for GC activities while she was not clear of what was expected of her. She reported that school members had differing views about what should involve school GC provision. She added that this made it difficult for her to meet the expectations of different people.

### *7.3 Enablers for Positioning of GC*

The results of the study pointed to a number of required enablers for positioning GC as a core component for SBPSS. These include: teamwork and inclusivity, commitment, empowerment and strong leadership. It was evident during discussion sessions that strong leadership is considered as the mainstay for all other identified enablers. Some participants eloquently expressed that strong leadership is the one that focuses on positive relationships to enable teamwork and inclusivity, commitment and empowerment. Sufficient research support the principle of relational leadership (that focuses on relationships) as basis for achieving sustainable positive change that benefits all (Burns et al., 2016; Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). For instance, Gittell and Douglass (2012) state that relational leadership denotes a reciprocal interrelationship between groups of people to make sense of the situation, to determine what is to be done and how to do it.

### *7.4 Conclusion*

From the findings of this study, it is evident that GC is not well positioned as an essential component of PSS. The study was conducted against the backdrop that the Lesotho government through MoET policies emphasizes the need to strengthen GC provision as another means of providing psychosocial support to vulnerable learners (MoET, 2005; MoET, 2009; MoET, 2012). The also draw from the background that Lesotho teacher training institutions have ensured integration of GC and other psychology based courses in teacher training programmes. The purpose is to equip teachers with necessary basic counselling skills. It is worth noting that despite this emphasis and efforts, GC position in SBPSS activities is not clear.

This study concludes that the current situation of GC as an essential component of PSS cannot bring a remarkable positive change as far as psychological variable of well-being is concerned. Despite the general view of stakeholders in education; MoET, teacher training institutions, teachers and parents of the need to strengthen GC, there is no clear direction from the MoET of how this can be achieved. In view of the findings of this, the authors of this paper suggest that schools should develop a new mind-set and begin to consider themselves as the main role players in the strengthening and proper positioning of GC. This article suggest that schools should tap into asset-based approach as the foundation for proper positioning GC in PSS activities. That is principals and teachers should shift from the negative view of themselves as inadequate people with limited knowledge for running GC activities. Ebersohn et al. (2015, p. 5) support that “in line with psychosocial support and care, the

fundamental principles of the asset-based approach include ownership and responsibility, practical solutions, a caring and supportive environment, building individuals' strengths, and ennoblement, together with collaboration and the establishment of partnerships and networks. From this statement it can be concluded that asset-based approach is emancipatory since it encourages the principals, teachers and parents to work together in identifying available resources and talents in schools so that they can be harmonized and utilized for sustainable purposeful position of GC. Under relational leadership which this article recommends that it should also be adopted, stronger teams can be built to facilitate purposeful positioning of GC that responds to the needs of schools and the communities. Asset-based approach recognise teachers' basic counselling skills as the available assets and the foundation in which more comprehensive GC programmes can be developed.

In addition, asset-based approach permits coordinated communication that clarifies what positioning of GC in SBPSS means to everyone involved. In this context, positioning of GC suggests clarity on what it involve-common understanding about its purpose. In addition, positioning of GC suggests practice that is; inclusive and accessible to every student, vision orientated-with clear goals and empowering to everyone involved. Moreover, proper positioning of GC proposes ethically motivated practice, for sustainability of positive change. Additionally, it suggests clarity who should be involved and why, what external support is needed, where and how to get it. In conclusion, it suggests common understanding how to keep on strengthening GC practice.

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