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The evaluation of classroom guidance activities in primary schools

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Abstract

Psychological counseling and guidance services are significant and inseparable parts of the education process. Guidance is a psychological help given by experts in order to direct a person to understand himself/herself, to solve his/her problems, to make realistic decisions, to improve his/her capacities up to his/her best, to adapt to his/her environment with balance and to perform himself/herself. The aim of this study is to evaluate the classroom guidance activities carried out by class guidance teachers in primary schools. The data of this study, which aimed to determine the questions related with the application process and to find answers for several questions, was obtained through a semi structured interview form. The data gathered from eight school counselors and 32 class guidance teachers were analyzed with descriptive analysis technique. Teachers claimed that they found an opportunity to get to know their students more than ever with the help of these guidance activities, the importance given to the guidance has increased in schools, and that they are able to find opportunities to make systematic and planned applications. The result of the interviews showed especially the lack of equipment for teachers to carry out the applications and the fact that the number of school counselors is not sufficient and it diminishes the functionality of the curriculum. In the interviews, we found that the weekly time allocated for guidance applications and the fact that the applications require more time than an average course makes the guidance curriculum harder to apply.

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1. Introduction

At present, we expect the education system to give individuals opportunities to improve themselves as a whole and to help them to become effective, productive and compatible individuals. In order to meet this expectation, we need several social and emotional skills which direct the nature of individuals' personality and behaviour as well as certain cognitive skills (Tan, 1992:31, Özgüven, 2001:3). Based on psychological counseling and guidance definitions of Jones (1963:8), Strang and Morris (1964:23), Miller (1968:7), Shertzer and Stone (1971:40), Kepçeoğlu (1999:13), and Kuzgun (2009:5), we can reach to this common definition: Psychological counseling and guidance is a systematic and professional process of assistance which aims to let the individuals to understand and

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administer themselves, to recognize surrounding facilities, to solve personal problems and to fulfill themselves by making the right decisions. In 1960s, developmental approach, which defines counseling as a study aiming to teach the developmental competencies, emerged. In this approach, students are given more chance to learn about themselves and the others. With the help of developmental guidance, students learn how to interact positively and effectively, thus they become active learners and acquire a positive school environment (Külahoğlu, 2004:133, Nazlı, 2005:33). In our country, there is a necessity to revise the "9th, 10th and 11th Grade Class Guiding Curriculum for Classroom Teachers of Secondary Education Institutions" which has been in use since 2000-2001 academic year due to the Board of Education's Decision No:87 dated 16.05.2000. "Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum" was developed in 2006-2007 academic year due to the Board of Education's Decision No: 329 dated 02.08.2006 (MEB, 2006:8). We can clearly see that "Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum" was prepared by taking comprehensive psychological counseling and guidance programs' principles which forms the practical aspects of developmental approach into consideration. The students who complete this program are intended to be able to: adapt to the school and the environment, utilize their full potential in order to rise their educational success levels, know, accept and improve themselves, understand and accept other people and improve their communication skills, develop positive attitudes and behaviours in order to pursue a safe and healthy life, achieve the necessary maturity to make educational and vocational decisions. This program is not a school guidance and counseling program; it is prepared for the use of class guidance teachers in guidance courses. According to Beesley (2004), Reiner, Colbert and Perusse (2009), comprehensive developmental guidance programs can not be maintained without the participation and the support of class teachers. In this context, opinions of class guidance teachers and school counselors form a quite significant data group on the evaluation of class guidance curriculum.

2. Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to evaluate the applied classroom guidance activities according to the opinions of class guidance teachers and school counselors.

Participants gave their opinions for these questions:

- 1- To classroom guidance teachers;
 - ✓ What kind of applications do you have in guidance courses?
 - ✓ What are the positive and negative aspects of the Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum?
 - ✓ What are the difficulties you encounter in the guidance courses and what are your proposed solutions for those difficulties?
- 2- To school counselors;
 - ✓ What are the positive aspects of Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum?
 - ✓ What are the negative aspects of Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum?
 - ✓ What are your suggestions on implementing and improving Class Guidance Curriculum?

3. Method

We tried to reflect the current situation with this study, which aimed to evaluate elementary level class guiding activities according to class guidance teachers and school counselors within the scope of Elementary and Secondary Class Guiding Curriculum, thus we used a descriptive survey (Kaptan, 1973:175). In this study, we identified the interview technique as the best choice out of qualitative research techniques. The data gathered using semi-structured interview forms is resolved by using descriptive analysis. Workgroup of the study consists of 40 participants which are chosen by using convenience sampling, 32 of them are class guidance teachers and 8 of them are school counselors working in primary schools under the Ministry of National Education.

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Interviews with Class Guidance Teachers

At the end of the interviews with class guidance teachers, we observed that teachers who are applying the activities required by Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum in guidance courses are few in numbers (n=8). Besides, there are some teachers who mentioned that they are not doing any activities in guidance courses (n=8). According to the class guidance teachers, this situation is caused by the lack of activities, lack of time allocated for application process and the fact that the guidance courses are used to solve the problems in the classroom. Some of the teachers (n=2) mentioned that they spend the time by both applying the activities and solving the problems in class. Some teachers (n=2) also mentioned that they are choosing among the activities within the program, thus apply only a part of the activities available.

Class guidance teachers who participated in the interview are asked to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of the guidance activities within the program. Being authentic, supportive for student development, appropriate for student level, attractive for students and affecting the teacher-student interaction positively are stated as the positive aspects of this program. The biggest problem in the application process of the guidance program is stated as the lack of given time (n=14).

Class guidance teachers stated the negative aspects of the guidance activities like these: class guidance activities are not appropriate for the level of students' development (n=4), thus it is not attractive for students, they find it hard to complete some of the activities (n=1), students are unable to reach a solution for their problems by the end of the guidance activities (n=1), the lack of school counselors in numbers (n=1), the lack of guidance teachers' level of expertise related to the guidance subjects (n=1), the fact that there is no supervision for the activities done in guidance courses (n=1), the fact that the forms/documents needed for the activities are costly (n=1), the fact that classrooms are crowded (n=1), the fact that class guidance program is not effective and sufficient (n=1), the fact that regional differences are ignored while preparing the program (n=1).

Most of the guidance teachers stated that the biggest problem related with this program is the time issue - the given time is not sufficient (n=9). They suggest that, in order to solve this problem, guidance courses should be scheduled to be carried out an hour in a week, not an hour in 15 days. Furthermore, they also suggest that, other than guidance courses, there should be another course dedicated to solve the general problems of the students.

Some teachers stated that not all of the activities within the program are appropriate for the nation-wide usage (n=2) and this problem can be solved by letting the guidance teacher to carry out their own guidance program provided that all the equipment and materials will be given.

The boredom of the students is another problem encountered in the application process of guidance activities (n=2). As the solution of this problem, teachers suggest that these activities should be updated. For instance, it is stated that, within the scope of vocational guidance, we should introduce the future professions. Another negative aspect of the program is that the forms applied in the courses are not evaluated (n=2). In this context, it is suggested that we give feedback to students based on those evaluations. Class guidance teachers state the lack of equipments related to the guidance course as a significant difficulty (n=2). They suggest that the number of school counselors and the support given to the class guidance teachers should be increased. They also suggest that, applied activities should be evaluated together with the school counselor and the necessary feedbacks should be provided. Another difficulty stated by the teachers is that they are unable to maintain family involvement in guidance activities and results (n=1). As a solution to this problem, they suggest that informative training for the families in the field of guidance should be given first.

4.2 Results of the Interviews with School Counselors

School Counselors stated that a nation-wide standard and system on guidance courses which is achieved with the application of class guidance curriculum is a positive aspect of the program (n=4).

It is stressed that student development is supported with guidance activities (n=3) and that the activities are carried out by class guidance teachers is perceived as a time-saving practice which improves the effectiveness (n=1).

The fact that some activities are not appropriate for the students' level of development which means they are prepared in an inelaborate manner is most encountered answer when asked for school counselors' negative criticism on the application of class guidance curriculum (n=3). Insufficient time (n=2), nation-wide and inflexible, standard program (n=2) and class guidance teachers that do not have the needed qualifications for providing guidance (n=1) are among the negative aspects of the program stated by the school counselors.

School counselors provided advice intended to apply and improve the class guidance curriculum. It is stated that the program should be of flexible structure (n=2), letting class guidance teachers have alternative activities to choose according to the needs (n=2). Besides, it is also stated that class guidance teachers and the school management are deficient in terms of guidance expertise; it is suggested to increase their expertise level with in-service training (n=2). Reorganizing the program provided with the attendance of the teachers and according to the needs of the schools (n=1) and reducing the number of activities within the program (n=1) are among the suggestions made to improve the overall program.

5. Results and Suggestions

This study aimed to evaluate the guidance activities applied in primary schools according to the opinions of class guidance teachers and school counselors. The results obtained from the analysis of gathered data can be summarized like this:

* It is observed that most of the class guidance teachers are not applying the activities required by Elementary and Secondary Class Guidance Curriculum on regular basis. It is understood that some of the class guidance teachers are not applying the program at all, some of them rather deal with the general problems of students in class, filling guidance course's time with activities outside of the program. Similar results are seen on Kızıl (2007)'s study as well.

* According to the class guidance teachers, guidance activities are authentic, supportive for student development, appropriate for student level, attractive for students and affecting the teacher-student interaction positively. Similarly, according to the school counselors the guidance courses reached to a nation-wide standart and system with the usage of the program which supports student development. These results are in accordance with the results of Lee (1993)'s, Carns and Carns (1991)'s, Kızıl (2007)'s, Hughey (1993)'s, Taşkaya ve Kurt (2010)'s, Terzi et al. (2011)'s, Demirel (2010)'s, Yazgünoğlu and Demirel (2012)'s studies.

* It is identified that the most significant problem encountered while applying the activities is that the time is not sufficient. It is suggested by the class guidance teachers that the allocated time for guidance courses should be increased and another course in which the general problems of the students in class will be solved should be added to the schedule. Kızıl (2007), Nazlı (2008), Berber (2010), Demirel (2010), Yazgünoğlu and Demirel (2012) also observed that the time allocated for guidance courses are insufficient.

* It is stated that family involvement in guidance activities can not be achieved and it is suggested by some of the class guidance teachers that families also should be trained on the field of guidance. This lack of family involvement is also stressed in Taşkaya and Kurt (2010)'s study.

* It is observed that class guidance teachers and the school management lack the required level of knowledge on the field of guidance. It is said that informative seminars and in-service trainings can be applied for those who need it. This lack of knowledge was also seen on Kızıl (2007)'s, Berber (2010)'s, Teker (2007)'s, Yumrutaş (2006)'s, Bardakçı (2011)'s, Yazgünoğlu and Demirel (2012)'s studies.

* Class guidance teachers and some of the school counselors think that the guidance program is not flexible. It is advised that the class guidance program should involve alternative activities and class guidance teachers should be able to prepare a guidance curriculum for each class provided that they receive all the equipment they need. This flexibility problem was also mentioned in Berber (2010)'s study.

* It is observed that the applications used in guidance courses are not concluded, the evaluation processes are not done.

* It is believed that the class guidance program is unable to meet the true requirements of schools because it is prepared by academics.

* It is clearly seen that the applications used in guidance courses and their results are not supervised.

* School counselors believe that it improves the efficiency of the program in terms of time management to let the class guidance teachers handle to application processes.

We believe that it will be beneficial to regulate the necessary parts of the curriculum, especially to increase the allocated time for guidance courses, to provide informative seminars and in-service trainings for all units and individuals related with the guidance program, to prepare standarts for concluding and supervising the applications used in the guidance courses.

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