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Elementary school teacher perceptions of school counselor effectiveness

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Abstract

Even though there exists a national, comprehensive model of school guidance counseling, perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding school counselor's responsibilities and effectiveness are greatly debated. The present study was conducted to determine teacher perceptions of the role and effectiveness of the school counselor in Bursa, Turkey. A modified version of the *Classroom Teacher Survey of School Counselor Effectiveness* (Beesley, 2004; Lepak, 2008) was used to evaluate teacher perceptions. Results indicated there is a significant difference between teachers' overall adequacy ratings and the additional responsibilities held by the school counselor.

Keywords: School Counselor, Elementary Education, Counseling, Elementary School Teachers, Perceptions

1. Introduction

Although exact function and responsibilities of school counselors have been long debated (Lepak, 2008), they have played an integral role within the school context since the beginning of the 19th century (Gysbers, 2001). Various school personnel, such as administrators and students, and even counselors themselves, are typically uncertain about school counselors' duties throughout the school day (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004; Monteiro-Leitner, et al., 2006; Zalaquett, 2005). Besides, whether the school counselor works effectively and adequately during the school day is also another issue of interest (Beesley, 2004; Lepak, 2008).

The youth of today face more complex issues and problems compared to the past. Therefore, teachers and counselors should work cooperatively (Nazlı, 2008) especially at the elementary level as the elementary school counseling plays an important role in the children's development regarding academic/career development, referrals, parental education. In this respect, a great proportion of the responsibility seems to be on the school counselor's effectiveness in providing the counseling services at elementary level. Additionally, as teachers should work in cooperation with the school counselor, their perceptions of school counselor's effectiveness will play a very important role to achieve this cooperation. There are a limited number of studies about the perceptions of elementary school teachers about school counselor's effectiveness in the literature (Beesley, 2004; Lepak, 2008; Nazlı, 2008).

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The duties of the school counselor are defined in the developmental counseling model accepted recently by Turkish National Education Ministry (MEB, 2003, 2006). However, the adequacy of counseling services provided by the school counselor must be questioned from the point of the elementary school teachers as they are members of the team. Therefore, a clear understanding of job expectations is necessary.

A study, conducted by Beesley (2004), indicated that counselors' strengths were most clearly seen and best utilized when there were more opportunities to perform classroom guidance lessons, facilitate individual counseling or group counseling sessions, provide consultative/collaborative activities, and work with special education services to meet the needs of all students. Another research study was conducted by Lepak (2008) to determine teacher perceptions of the role of the school counselor. A total of 33 teachers responded to a modified version of the *Classroom Teacher Survey of School Counselor Effectiveness* (Beesley, 2004) to evaluate teacher perceptions. Monteiro-Leitner and colleagues (2006) found that consultation took up more time than they imagined. However, school counselors were satisfied with the amount of time they spent for individual or group guidance activities, with an average of 17.5 hours to 18.5 hours per week.

Besides, school counselor's effectiveness can be influenced by the additional duties s/he has at school. Gysbers and Henderson (2000, in Monteiro-Leitner *et al.*, 2006) found that counselors often find themselves engaged in clerical duties or performing disciplinary actions, despite these are usually considered as administrators' responsibilities. As a result of the change in economic and social circumstances, the counselor's role has also changed (Nazlı, 2008). Currently, the emphasis of school counseling is on the whole student, and there has been a shift toward providing more direct services to students with expanded emphases on their social and emotional development to prepare them most effectively and accommodate for the increasingly complex problems in today's society (Akos & Galassi, 2004, in Lepak, 2008; MEB, 2003, 2006).

Consequently, this study will explore teachers' perceptions of school counselors' effectiveness in general and when counselors have additional responsibilities apart from counseling. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is: 1) to investigate elementary school teachers' perceptions of the role of the school counselor as determined by a questionnaire, 2) to throw a light on the field of school counseling in Turkey, 3) offer some implications to school counselors regarding best practices in providing counseling services to students in their schools, and 4) provide some information to the administrators regarding how elementary school teachers perceive the effectiveness of the school counselors in Turkish elementary schools.

2. Methodology

The present study is a descriptive one which tries to identify the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding school counselors' effectiveness. All participants in this study were elementary school teachers who taught 1st-8th grade at various government elementary schools throughout the city of Bursa, Turkey. 163 elementary school teachers (female n=118, male n=45) participated voluntarily in the present study. The schools were selected according to whether there is a school counselor at school or not. There was a school counselor in schools of all the participants. The questionnaire for this study was a modified version of the questionnaire used by Lepak (2008) which was also a modified version of *Classroom Teacher Survey of School Counselor Effectiveness* developed by Beesley (2004). As the instrument partially meet the specific needs of the present study, modifications were made to find answers to the research objectives. The questionnaire consisted of six items, each containing subcategories requiring additional response. Anonymity was protected, as names or other identifying information were not used on the questionnaire. All appropriate descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data.

3. Results

3.1. Adequacy Scores

The first question analyzed in the present study was teacher perceptions of the school counselor's effectiveness in delivering services which were considered as *most important* for student success.

Table 1 reports the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of each counselor duty as perceived by teachers.

Table 1. Frequencies, percentages, means and std. deviations of adequacy ratings

	Completely Adequate		Somewhat Adequate				Inadequate		Completely Inadequate		I don't know		MEAN/STD.DEV.	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	MEAN	STD.DEV.
	Individual Counseling	23	14,1	43	26,4	54	33,1	35	21,5	7	4,3			3,2469
Group Counseling	16	9,8	43	26,4	43	26,4	49	30,1	7	4,3	5	3,1	3,0759	1,07989
Crisis Interv/Prev	15	9,2	29	17,8	54	33,1	40	24,5	14	8,6	11	6,7	2,9408	1,10528
Classroom Presentations	17	10,4	44	27,0	40	24,5	43	26,4	17	10,4	2	1,2	3,0062	1,18056
Testing/Interpretation	22	13,5	44	27,0	48	29,4	37	22,7	8	4,9	4	2,5	3,2201	1,10607
Acad/Career Prep	30	18,4	52	31,9	46	28,2	25	15,3	3	1,8	7	4,3	3,5192	1,03781
Sending to RAMs	39	23,9	67	41,1	35	21,5	13	8,0	4	2,5	5	3,1	3,7848	0,9926
Public Relations	32	19,6	50	30,7	52	31,9	23	14,1	1	,6	5	3,1	3,5633	0,99318
Parent Ed/Fam. Consult	28	17,2	56	34,4	48	29,4	26	16,0	4	2,5	1	,6	3,4815	1,03493
Staff Development	20	12,3	52	31,9	46	28,2	31	19,0	7	4,3	7	4,3	3,3013	1,06813
Special Ed Plans	22	13,5	52	31,9	47	28,8	25	15,3	8	4,9	9	5,5	3,3571	1,07666
Scheduling/ Enrollment	30	18,4	57	35,0	36	22,1	23	14,1	4	2,5	13	8,0	3,5733	1,05771
Supervision	21	12,9	47	28,8	48	29,4	34	20,9	3	1,8	10	6,1	3,3203	1,03016

Three of the service areas were rated as inadequate to completely inadequate by at least one-thirds of the respondents. These included (1) Classroom Presentations (37%), (2) Group Counseling (34.4%), (2) Crisis Intervention/Prevention (33.1%). Several areas of service that were considered as somewhat adequate by the teachers were (1) Individual Counseling (33.1%), (2) Crisis Intervention/Prevention (33.1%), (3) Public Relations (31.9%), (4) Testing/Interpretation (29.4%), (4) Supervision (29.4%).

3.2. Perceptions of How School Counselors Should Spend Their Time Each Week

The second research question of the present study was related to teacher perceptions of the amount of time that elementary school counselors should spend on various tasks each week. Data were analyzed through comparing teacher ratings related to the areas of service school counselors provided. Teachers believed counselors spend the most time each week in five areas: 1) individual counseling, 2) parent education/family consultation, 3) group counseling, 4) classroom presentations, and, 5) academic/career preparation. Results also indicated that 57.7% (n=84) of teachers believed that elementary school counselors should spend between 3 and 8 hours each week on individual counseling. In the area of parent education/family consultation, 55.2% (n=90) of teachers thought that their school counselors should spend 3-8 hours delivering this service to students each week. For group counseling, 53.4% (n=87) indicated that their school counselors should spend between 3-8 hours providing this type of counseling service to students each week. In addition, 83 of 163 teachers responded that their elementary school counselors should spend 3-8 hours each week for classroom presentations in their school. Finally, 48.8% (n=78) elementary school teachers thought that their school counselors should allocate 3 and 8 hours for academic/career preparation.

3.3. Perceptions of School Counselor Effectiveness as Related to Additional Responsibilities

The third question of the present study was to answer whether there was a significant difference between the perceived adequacy ratings of elementary school teachers who indicated no or one-or-more additional responsibilities of the school counselors in their schools. Results of the the t-test scores regarding the overall adequacy ratings and existence of one-or-more additional responsibilities indicate that there is a significant difference between adequacy ratings of teachers whose school counselors had no additional responsibilities and whose school counselors have one or more additional responsibilities [$t(161)=2.88, p<.05$]. Teachers whose school

counselors had one or more additional responsibilities ($X=43.88$) indicated lower adequacy ratings than teachers whose school counselors had no additional responsibilities ($X=38.37$).

3.4. Frequency of Meetings between Elementary School Teachers and the School Counselors

The findings of the question related to the frequency of meetings indicated that 36.2% ($n=59$) of elementary school teachers “sometimes” met with the school counselor in their schools. 25.8% of teachers declared that they “often” met the school counselors in their schools ($n=42$).

3.5. Overall Satisfaction of Services Provided by the School Counselor and Perceptions of whether the Number of School Counselors is Sufficient at School

In general, elementary school teachers responded that they were satisfied with the services provided by the school counselor in their building (46%, $n=75$).

According to 36.2% of elementary school teachers participated in the present study, the number of school counselors in their building was sufficient, whereas 54.6% of them ($n=89$) reported that the number of school counselors was not sufficient in their schools.

4. Discussion

The results of this study illustrated that these teacher responses regarding the effectiveness of their school counselors' services in their school were adequate. All computed scores were at or above the mean average of 3 for "adequate;" however, some individual responses indicated some level of inadequacy with each service provided by the school counselor. Based on their percentages, the areas of classroom presentations, crisis intervention/prevention and group counseling had the lowest adequacy ratings which were the most important duties of school counselors in Turkey according to MEB.

Results also indicated that in the area of academic/career preparation 78.5% of elementary school teachers believed that the counselor in their school performs this responsibility adequately. In the area of public relations, 83% of teachers said that the counselor in their school performs this responsibility adequately. With respect to parent education/family consultation 82% of teachers thought that the counselor in their school performs this responsibility adequately.

Teacher perceptions of the amount of time their school counselors spend on various tasks each week were analyzed through comparing teacher ratings. The five areas where teachers believed counselors spent the most time each week were: individual counseling, parent education/family consultation, group counseling, classroom presentations, and, academic/career preparation. Individual counseling and group counseling were the common findings in the study of Lepak (2008).

Compared to the results of Monteiro-Leitner, *et al.* (2006), the findings of the present study indicated that school counselors in Bursa, Turkey were perceived to spend less time performing individual counseling and group counseling services. These differences are interesting and suggest that the provision of school counseling services may differ from country to country and from level to level.

There was a significant difference between the perceived adequacy ratings of elementary school teachers who indicated no or one-or-more additional responsibilities of the school counselors in their schools. The number of additional responsibilities held by the school counselor influenced the level of adequacy that elementary school teachers perceived for the school counselors in their schools. Teachers whose school counselors had one or more additional responsibilities had different overall adequacy ratings than those teachers who reported their counselors to have no additional responsibilities. We can conclude from these findings that the school counselors should not be given additional responsibilities as the elementary school teachers stated that the number of school counselors is not sufficient for their school.

Additionally, according to MEB school counselors are not to spend any time teaching classes when teachers are absent, on school duty, preparing ceremonies, or assisting with duties in the principal's office. Supervising study

halls is also a duty that is inappropriate for school counselors. These results can be explained by the fact that elementary school teachers may not be fully aware of the role and responsibilities of the school counselors.

Consequently, the present study was conducted to throw a light on the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding school counselors' effectiveness. Overall findings indicate that elementary school teachers perceive the areas of service provided by the school counselor in their schools as adequate and that they are satisfied with the services in general. A surprising result was that teachers thought the number of school counselors in their schools was not sufficient; however, they were satisfied with the counseling services they provided. This may be because of the fact that elementary school teachers have different perceptions regarding the responsibilities of the school counselors (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Fitch, Newby, Ballester, & Marshall, 2001; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004; Monteiro-Leitner, et al, 2006; Zalaquett, 2005, as cited in Lepak, 2008).. With a small sample size, it is difficult to generalize the findings of the present study. Follow-up questions can be asked from the results of this study. A larger sample would also provide a clearer understanding as to whether or not these significant results occurred by chance. Surveying teachers from a variety of discipline areas may also yield different results, and it could be more feasible to compare groups based on gender, year of experience or subject area.

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