

HOW CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES AFFECT CAREER CHOICE AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MERU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: Career guidance activities offered in public secondary schools are meant to assist students succeed in their careers after finishing O-level education. The knowledge that students acquire through career offices should therefore help them to remove confusion, anxiety, indecisiveness, and should empower them with information on clear career paths; relevant occupations in the context of their talents, academic abilities and market trends. The purpose of this study was to determine how career guidance services affect career choice among public secondary school students in Meru County, Kenya

Problem statement: However many secondary school students complete their studies without a clear understanding of the courses to enroll for upon joining institutions of higher learning. The study sought to examine the extent to which nature of career guidance services influence career choice of students in public secondary school in Meru County.

Study Methodology: Descriptive survey and correlational research designs were adopted in this study. Questionnaires and a structured interview schedule were used to collect data. Thirty six schools were sampled through stratified random sampling technique and an equal number of principals and career guidance teachers from sampled secondary schools obtained. Systemic sampling was used to sample 377 form four students while 11 parents were sampled using purposive sampling technique, making a total of 460 respondents. A pre-test on questionnaires was done to ensure validity while reliability was computed where Cronbach's Alpha value was used. Data was then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 and Microsoft excel where, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistic, that is, linear regression analysis was computed accordingly.

Results of the study: The major findings were that most public secondary schools (78.8%) didn't have professionally qualified career guidance teachers while 57.6% allocated less than 5% of operational budget to cater for career oriented activities.

Conclusion: The study concluded that career guidance services were statistically significant in influencing career choice of students in public secondary schools. Establishment of fully fledged career guidance offices with well-trained career teachers and adequate funding can help achieve the planned career-oriented activities.

Recommendations: This study recommends deliberate allocation of sufficient funds to run career guidance services and involvement of all in supporting this initiative.

Keywords: *Career guidance services, career guidance teacher, career counseling, career choice, career information services*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Pam (2013) defines career choice as the act of deciding what one wants to do in life that determines one's success in the next stages of life. Career guidance involves activities that are made up of planned experiences that enhance knowledge of self and make one build confidence and to be optimistic, thus able to set constructive external goals by identifying future goals and vocational identity (Robertson, 2013; Pitan & Atiku, 2017).

Career preparation helps remove confusion, anxiety and indecisiveness and brings life satisfaction that result in enjoying what one does and having a level of competency through formal assessment (Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015). The increasing competition in the job market has made pro-active career planning even more critical to students as they must decide the type of profession they want to have in life. Consequently, students ought to make career decisions early if they are to succeed in the highly competitive job markets (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Regardless of the approaches used in different countries to prepare the young people for future career paths, research indicates that a career that matches one's interest, skills and values is one of life's most important decisions because it significantly increases one's chances for socio-economic success and personal fulfillment (Stillwell & Sable, 2013; Koech, Bitok, Ruto, Koech, Okoth, Korir & Ngala, 2016; Mudulia, 2017).

In a bid to overcome challenges on career choice, some middle and low income countries have developed policy goals for career guidance and orientation services that link high school graduates to technical and vocational education, colleges and universities (Nong, 2016; Slovacek, Jacob & Flenoury, 2015; Egbo, 2017). In Nigeria for example, vocational guidance was incorporated in secondary school education to assist students make informed career choice (Egbo, 2017) while Pakistan has emphasized the need to base students' career choice on facts, information and appropriate guidance that match individual personality type and other intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Kazi, Sharif & Ahmad, 2017).

The government of Kenya recognizes that education, training, science and technology fundamentally prepare people with knowledge and skills that enable them to make informed choices about their social and economic growth (Republic of Kenya, 2013). However, this cannot be achieved in isolation without intervening measures such as the career guidance services. The creation of Vocational and Educational Guidance and Counseling Department in 1970 and the production of career guidance handbook for pupils and students in 2009 (MoE, 2009) are some of the intervening measures introduced to support career guidance services. Although career guidance provisions are incorporated in guidance and counseling in secondary schools Wambu and Fisher

(2015) contend that guidance and counseling is not a major component of education curriculum in Kenyan secondary schools.

Despite the underlying facts that education is at the core of economic growth and development of the country, many of the youth in Kenya and indeed in many countries are not certain of what career to pursue (Njeru, 2016). In Kenya, career choice is a critical but complicated task that involves a difficult process of decision making and affects all secondary school students (Njeru, 2016; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Studies conducted in Meru County on career choice revealed that students were inadequately prepared for career choice (Mutwiri, 2015). Other scholars such as Mudulia (2017) interrogated the forms of career guidance services offered to secondary school students and their influence on career choice. However, not much could be gathered from the reviewed literature on the extent to which the aforementioned factor influence career choice among secondary school students, thus, the question and knowledge gap that spurred the undertaking of this study in public secondary schools in Meru County. The study aimed to assess the effects of career guidance services on career choice among secondary school students in Meru County Kenya. It hypothesized that career guidance services do not significantly influence career choice among secondary school students in Meru County Kenya.

In conceptualizing this study, the questions that arose and required answers were:

- i. Do the current career guidance services address student career needs adequately?
- ii. Were the teacher-counselors adequately and professionally qualified to articulate and demonstrate an understanding of career guidance?
- iii. To what extent do career guidance services affect career choice of public secondary school students in Meru County?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In an age of economic globalization, many people particularly the youth are faced with some major challenges as they transit from school to the world of work (Mann & Huddleston, 2016; Egbo, 2017). In order to tackle this problem and navigate the changes in the job market successfully, an individual requires extensive knowledge about self, education and occupational opportunities that are available (Hooley & Rice, 2018). Studies by Mudulia (2017) and Nong (2016) contends that career guidance if infused in the school curriculum would shed a lot of light on the relationship between work and school. This study concurs with Mudulia that students should have adequate time to seek career guidance services.

Countries like the USA, Canada and Australia have developed policy frameworks geared towards career management training that sought to create a competency framework that articulate the concept of career management skills for career workers, policy makers, teachers and students (Hooley, Watts, Sultana & Neary, 2013; Nong, 2016). Further, USA and Singapore have all-inclusive school guidance and counseling services that are implemented by trained permanent school counselors (Harris, 2013; MoE [Singapore], 2012). However, in Kenya this is not the case as this study illustrates.

Though vocational and educational guidance and counseling has been in existence since 1970's (MoEST, 2005) many reports and studies show that learning institutions in Kenya have continuously released students that are not well equipped for future careers (Mudulia, 2017; Njeru,

2016; Mundi, 2017). This implies that, in order to successfully and effectively imparts necessary skills to the youth; an effective secondary education in the twenty-first century must provide a good balance between academics, education and skills development that will lead to desired career pathways (Gichuki, 2015; KUCCPS, 2019). Despite efforts taken by secondary schools in Kenya such as in servicing of teachers and having “career days”, the current status in Kenyan schools with reference to career guidance and counseling reveals glaring gaps. This is because students have continued to experience difficulties in making informed future career decisions.

The foregoing discussion indicates that career guidance has become indispensable as far as making career choice among secondary school students is concerned. Further, not much was gathered from reviewed literature on whether funding of career activities was in tandem with career need of high school students. It was, therefore, on this understanding that effort were made to establish whether the manner in which career guidance was done was effective in achieving the desired results and hence provide solutions to students in public secondary schools in Meru County.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is part of a large study that was conducted in public secondary schools in Meru County from 2017 to 2019. The study adopted both descriptive survey and correlational research designs. Questionnaires and a structured interview schedule were used to collect data from form four students, career guidance teachers and principals and parents respectively. Stratified random sampling was used in which the researcher established strata according to the number of sub-counties that are in Meru County. Public secondary schools in each sub-county were then categorized into sub-strata in form of girls boarding, boys boarding, mixed boarding and mixed day secondary schools. In total, thirty six schools were sampled and equal number of principals and career guidance teachers from sampled secondary schools. Systemic sampling was used to sample 377 form four students while 11 parents were sampled using purposive sampling technique, making a total of 460 respondents. Through pre-testing, questionnaires were tested for content and construct validity while reliability was computed where Cronbach’s Alpha value (correlation coefficient, $r=0.760$) was noted. Data was then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 and Microsoft excel where, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistic, that is, linear regression analysis was computed accordingly.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Professional Qualification of Career Guidance Teachers

Principals of public secondary schools were asked whether they had professionally qualified career guidance teachers to which only 7 (21.2%) principals answered in affirmative as shown in Figure 1.

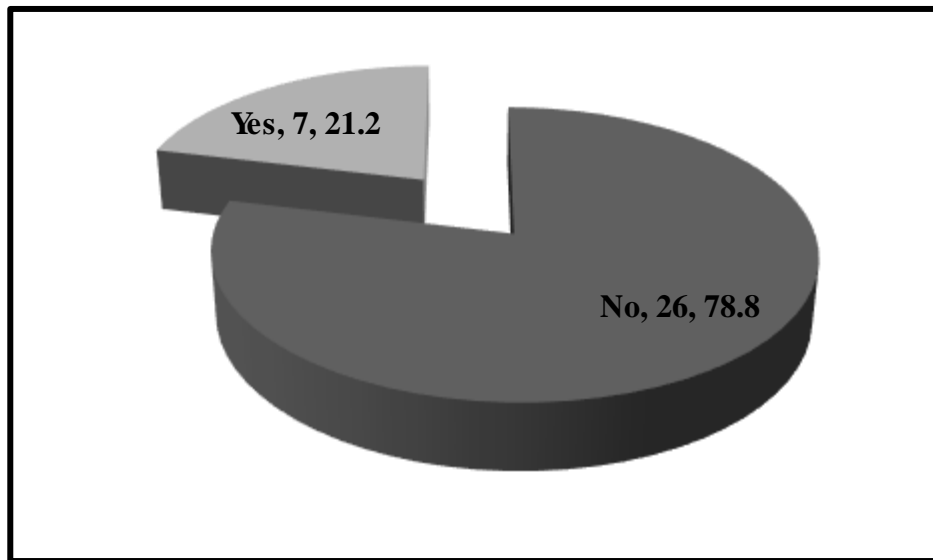


Figure 1: Response on whether secondary schools had professionally qualified career guidance teachers

It is clear that an overwhelming majority (26, 78.8%) of public secondary schools don't have professionally qualified career guidance teachers. Similarly, information gathered from career guidance teachers showed that half (50%) of them had no background training in career guidance. Among the trained ones, 11(34.4%) had gained the training by attending workshops and seminars on career guidance, while 5(15.6%) had a degree in guidance and counseling. The results are indicating a serious professional gap as far as career guidance services in secondary schools are concerned. These results corroborates studies by Gitonga (2013) in Kenya and Nong, (2016) in South Africa who revealed that 87% and 69% respectively, of guidance and counseling teachers were found inadequately prepared and less knowledgeable to run the guidance and counseling programs in secondary schools. With such variability in training qualifications as indicated above, school counselors are not adequately skilled to assist on matters relating to performance, career and individual issues affecting students. It is important to note here that career counselors require not just expansive career knowledge but also clinical skills (Mann & Huddleston, 2016; Gichuki, 2015). Therefore, first a career guidance policy that redefines the school career counselor's role and the needed preparation and training; which will meet the needs of the 21st century secondary school students is needed. Secondly, empowered career practitioners who are well informed of the pedagogical and entrepreneurial challenges which students are likely to face and formulate ways of mitigating them are more likely to be efficient in handling career guidance services (Gough, 2017).

4.2 Availability of Career Guidance Services

When asked to indicate how career services are offered at their secondary schools, most principals (36.4%) said that they are offered during career days. Information presented in Table 1 shows that such careers days are held once a year.

Table 1: Career Oriented Services and Duration

How are career oriented services programmed for students in your school?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Done during career days	12	36.4	36.4
Done during free time	9	27.3	63.6
Done during academic clinics	8	24.2	87.9
Done within the lessons	4	12.1	100.0
Total	33	100.0	
How often do you hold career days in your school?	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
One's a Year	18	54.5	54.5
Never	8	24.2	78.8
Once a Term	6	18.2	97.0
Every Two Years	1	3.0	100.0
Total	33	100.0	

It was surprising to note that some schools don't have career days as indicated by 8(24.2%) in Table 1. This implies that the majority of incumbent career guidance teachers have not initiated career-oriented activities in their public secondary schools. This could be attributed to the lack of knowledge in career guiding services as confirmed by information presented in Table 1 where, 16 (50.0%) career guidance teachers said that they had no background training in career guidance. The lack of teachers who are professionally trained in career guidance may explain the scanty and non-vibrant career oriented services in public secondary schools. In addition, lack of a clear definition of role of career guidance teachers has greatly hindered the delivery of career guidance and counseling services in public secondary school (Wambu & Fisher, 2015). Inadequate facilities and resources in career guidance departments also contributed to lack of aggressiveness in initiating career-oriented activities in public secondary schools. Similarly a study by Bitu (2015) revealed that 72% of the career guidance offices in mixed day secondary schools in Kisumu County, Kenya had inadequate furniture while 67.6% of the departments had below average services index functionality.

This scenario is likely to cause some frustrations in career guidance services considering that the services of career guidance teachers are the most commonly used strategies as indicated by students (mean = 2.28) in helping students make informed career decisions. Parents also seemed to have endorsed this idea. The majority parents said that learners are guided by career teachers in selecting subjects while some parents seemed to have held interactive discussions with teachers on career issues regarding their children. One parent (SCJMD₁) said, "*I discussed with career guidance teacher together with the child and came up with a career*".

Further, when asked to indicate the extent to which the current career guidance services addresses students' career needs in their schools, more than half of career guidance teachers (17, 53.1%) chose the option of moderate extent. This is shown in Figure 2

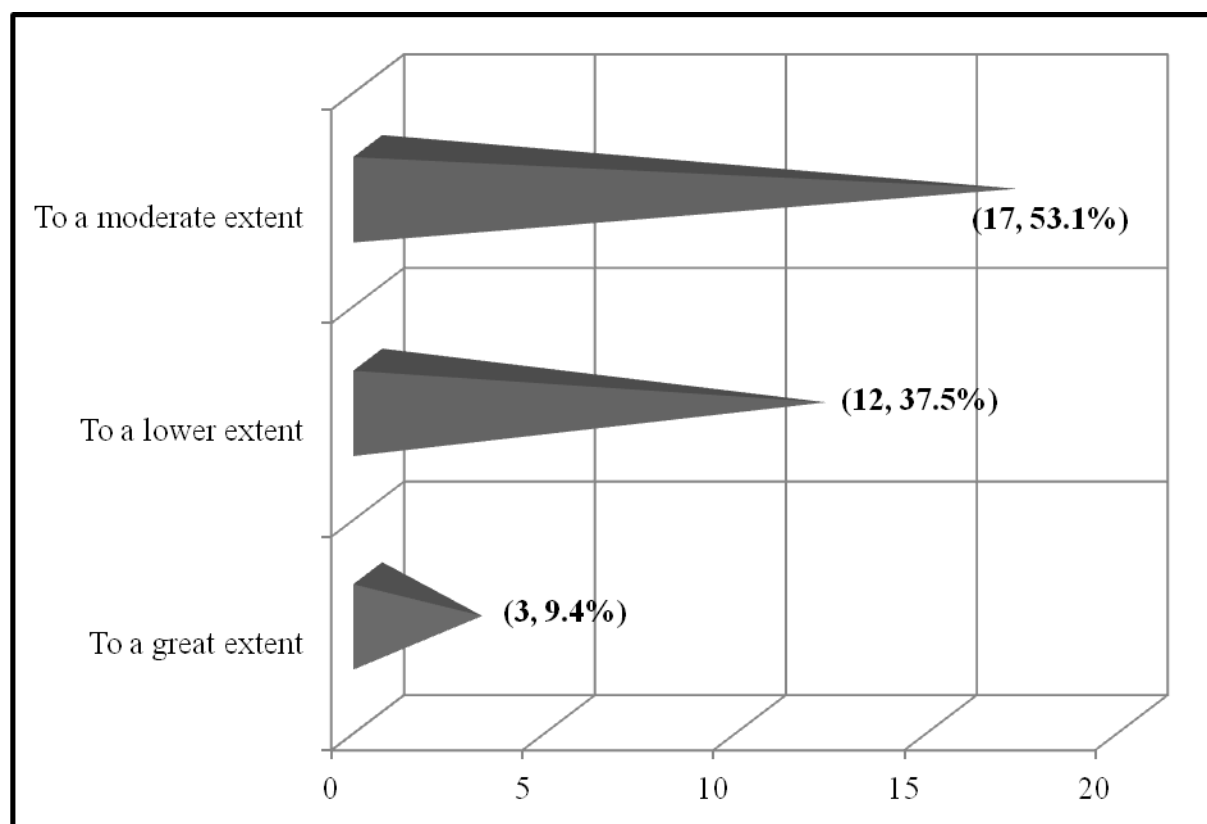


Figure 2. Career guidance opinion on whether the current career guidance services address students' career needs in their schools.

The findings shows that only 3 (9.4%) who described the career guidance services as capable of addressing students' career needs in their schools to a great extent. When parents were asked during interview session to comment on how effective career guidance services were in their schools, a majority termed them as not effective. One parent (SCHMD₃) said, *"information on career doesn't start early in school life, it is done at the final year hence not very effective"*. Two parents (SCDGB₁& SCCBB₂) attributed the ineffectiveness to *"lack of seriousness among students"*, while another parent (SCBMB₅) recommended *"need for more career guidance sessions"*. The foregoing results are showing indispensable need for career guidance teacher and career services in order to meet students' career expectations. The success of such undertakings requires sufficient support from the school management. This study therefore wanted to know the financial commitments towards supporting career-oriented activities in public secondary schools in Meru County.

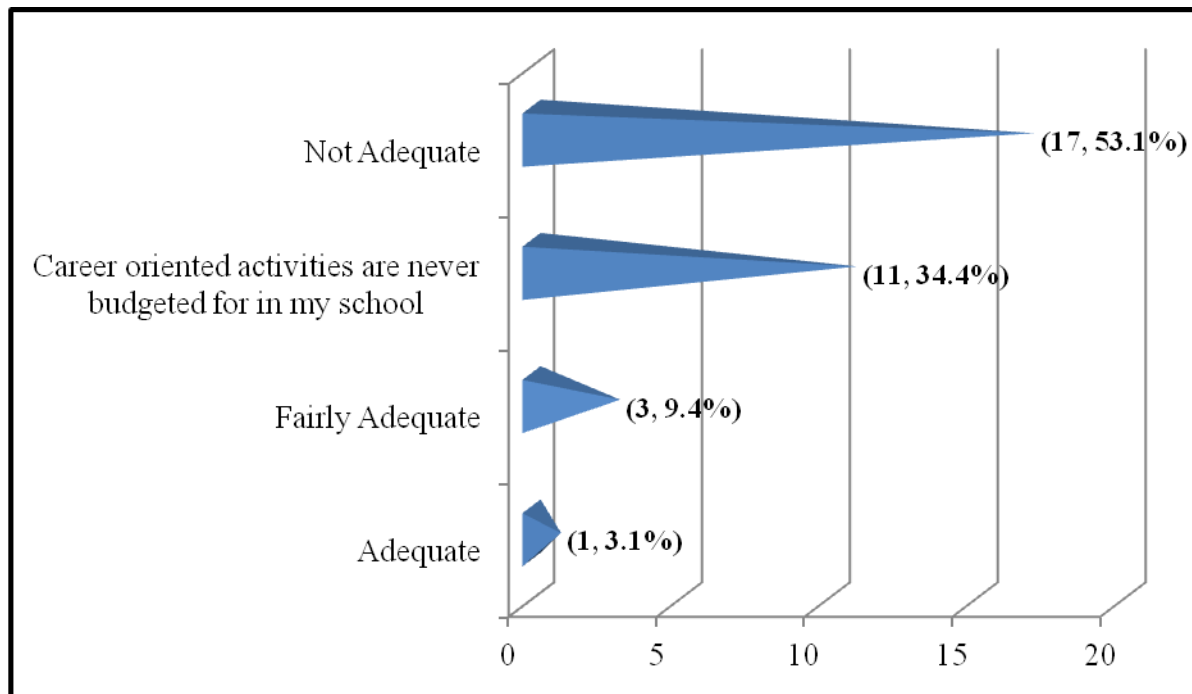
4.3 Adequacy of Budget allocation to Career Oriented Activities

Principals of public secondary schools were asked to indicate the percentage of the schools' operational budget that is allocated to cater for career oriented activities in their schools. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage of the schools' operational budget allocated to cater for career oriented activities

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 5%	19	57.6	57.6
Zero %	9	27.3	84.8
10%	2	6.1	90.9
15%	2	6.1	97.0
More than 15%	1	3.0	100.0
Total	33	100.0	

The results in Table 2 reveal that most public secondary schools (19, 57.6%) allocate less than 5% of operational budget to cater for career oriented activities. Surprisingly, quarter of the schools (9, 27.3%) do not allocate any budget to cater for career oriented activities. When consulted on the same, 17, (53.1%) career guidance teacher said that the budget allocated by their secondary schools to cater for career-oriented activities and services was not adequate. As shown in Figure 3, only 5 (15.2%) public secondary schools allocated from 10% and above of the operational budget to cater for career oriented activities.

**Figure 3. Adequacy of budget allocation to career oriented activities in public secondary schools**

The results indicate that majority of the public secondary schools in Meru County have not prioritized career oriented activities as evidenced by either insufficient or lack of budget allocation. The study by Mudulia, Ayiro and Kipsoi (2017) also had a similar observation that, despite availability of career guidance department in secondary schools in Vihiga County, it was unfortunate that most of them were inadequately equipped to effectively offer guidance. Capacity building in career matters is a noble investment that requires sufficient budget allocation. A below 50% rating of availability of such resources like videos, computers, internet, career books, journals

and magazines was also observed in most of the schools, which could also be attributed to insufficient budget. Career guidance is essential yet many secondary schools in Kenya were inadequately funded, less equipped and had few staff in career guidance department (Mudulia et al., 2017). The results imply need for deliberate efforts in prioritizing adequate budget allocation in career programs and activities by all the school stakeholders. Budget deficiency may curtail effective implementation of career oriented activities in public secondary schools in Meru County.

4.4 The extent to which career guidance services affect career choice among students of secondary schools in Meru County

In ascertaining the extent to which career guidance services affect career choice among students of secondary schools in Meru County, a linear regression analysis was conducted where dependent variable (career choice) was regressed on the independent variable (career guidance services). This also helped to determine the prediction value of career guidance services offered in secondary schools on career choice by students. The results are presented in three Tables; 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Influence of career guidance services on career choice: ANOVA results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
X1	Regression	1.871	1	1.871	8.324	.007 ^b
	Residual	6.742	346	.225		
	Total	8.612	347			

a. Dependent Variable: Y

b. Predictors: (Constant), X1

Table 4: Influence of career guidance services on career choice: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
X1	.466 ^a	.217	.191	.47405	1.347

a. Predictors: (Constant), X1

b. Dependent Variable: Y

Table 5 Influence of career guidance services on career choice: Regression Weights

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.485	.591		4.202	.000		
	X1	.474	.164	.466	2.885	.007	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Results in ANOVA Table 3 shows that model is significant in predicting the variations in the dependent variable where $P = .007$ which is less than the alpha value of 0.05; $F_{(1,346)} = 8.324$, while Pearson correlation results between dependent and independent variable in Table 4 indicates coefficient correlation $r = .466^{**}$. The results show that there is a positive and significant relationship between career guidance services and the career choice of students of public secondary

schools in Meru County. Consequently, the null hypothesis that, *career guidance services do not significantly influence career choice among secondary school students in Meru County Kenya* was rejected and concluded that career guidance services statistically and significantly influence career choice among secondary school students in Meru County Kenya.

Table 5 shows a VIF value of 1 which helps to rule out multicollinearity between elements of the study variable hence the model was fit for data analysis and interpretations (Salmerón Gómez, García Pérez, López Martín & García, 2016). The results also show the coefficient values (regression weights) of the predictor variable (career guidance services) and the corresponding level of significance. Similar results were obtained by Mudulia, Ayiro and Kipsoi (2017) who were investigating the impact of career counselors on career choice among secondary school girls in Vihiga County, Kenya. They found that there was a relationship between career guidance services and career choice ($r=.51$; $p<.05$). The findings show need for revamping career guidance in secondary schools owing to its great influence on learners' career choice.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that career guidance services are statistically significant in influencing career choice of public secondary school students. It is also clear that teachers appointed as career counselors play vital role in advising students not only in subjects' selection but also in choosing careers. This underscores the need for engaging trained career guidance teachers and the need to provide profound careers information services and programs in secondary schools. Establishment of fully fledged career guidance office will therefore enable introduction of appropriate career-oriented activities, services in secondary schools. Such initiative further calls for adequate allocation of budget in order to achieve the planned career-oriented activities and support professional development of career guidance teachers.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that most career guidance departments in public secondary schools in Meru County are inadequately funded. This study recommends deliberate allocation of sufficient funds towards supporting career guidance activities and programs. Principals of secondary schools should be in the forefront in organizing public awareness campaigns through seminars, public lectures and workshops to sensitize students, parents, government agents and the general public on the need for career guidance services in order to secure support from all stakeholders. The principals should further provide leadership in ensuring school programs are adjusted to afford adequate time for career counseling sessions. This study recommend for employment of professionally qualified guidance and counseling teachers to carry out this crucial service to primary and secondary school students. This has implications on policy by the ministry of education and teachers service commission, and contribute valuable information on career counseling and preparations.

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