

Practicality of Guidance and Counselling Strategy in Enhancing Retention of Children under Complementary Basic Education for Tanzania in Selected Districts of Mara Region

Annamary Peter¹; Catherine Muteti²

¹PhD Student, Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Planning and Administration (PhD-EPA), Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU), Tanzania

²Senior Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies (DEPC), Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU), Tanzania

Abstract:- This study sought to investigate the practicality of guidance and counselling Strategy in enhancing retention of children under Complementary Basic Education for Tanzania (COBET) in selected Districts in Mara Region. A convergent design under a mixed method was used to examine the problem. The target population was 99 COBET centres, 99 head teachers, 133 teachers, and 898 children. From this population, a sample of 30 centres, 14 head teachers, 54 teachers, and 90 children was selected using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques, totalling 158 participants. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. The validity of the data collection instruments was verified by subject matter experts, and the questionnaire's reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha (0.802). Trustworthiness was ensured through peer review and triangulation. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including an independent t-test at a 0.05 significance level, while the qualitative data was analysed through thematic. The study found that teachers employed guidance and counselling strategy by understanding the reasons for school dropout, valuing children's experiences, and promoting self-growth but not in career guidance. It was revealed that though teachers felt that they gained an in-depth understanding of children's expectations about their school, children under COBET showed dissatisfaction. There was no significant difference between the mean scores of professional and para-professional teachers in employing guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of the children. The study concludes that Guidance and counselling strategy is employed by teachers to enhance children's retention in the programme although with some deficiencies. Since both professional and para - professional teachers apply the guidance and counselling strategy equally in enhancing the retention of the children under complementary basic education, the professional teachers are not fulfilling their due in employing strategy

as expected. The head teachers should continuously encourage teachers to use facilitative strategies through meetings and workshops monthly to enhance the retention of children under COBET.

Keywords:- Guidance and Counselling, Retention, Professional, Para-Professional, Practicality.

I. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of a nation is increasingly reliant on the education its citizens receive, as education involves the acquisition and development of new knowledge, wisdom, attitudes, values, and skills, making it a cornerstone of any country's development strategy (Sodirjonov, 2020). Education provides substantial, well-documented benefits by creating a skilled human resource base essential for enhancing productivity, and plays a transformative role in individuals' lives (Thomas et al., 2021). As a result, countries must ensure citizens receive quality education to achieve their premeditated developmental goals, including accommodating those who could not complete their schooling but desire a second opportunity to finish their studies. Education is recognized as a fundamental human right, as highlighted by numerous international conventions, such as the United Nations Declaration of 1948, the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, and the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (Iglesias, 2023; Saini et al., 2023).

As a signatory to international conventions recognizing education as a basic right, Tanzania has integrated this principle into its policies and reforms, such as the Education for Self-Reliance in 1967, the national literacy campaign of 1970, and the Universal Primary Education (UPE) campaign of 1974, aimed at ensuring all citizens have access to education (Mbogoma, 2018; MoEST, 2023). However, the government's efforts have faced challenges, including over-dependence on donor support, a centralized planning system,

and lack of motivation among teachers, leading to a slow pace in achieving the UPE and increasing levels of illiteracy among citizens (Mrisho, 2017). Kilimwiko (2021) asserts that the Tanzanian literacy level has been deteriorating, with a drop in the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary schools from 71.6% in 1983 to 59.6% in 2020 and an increase in the level of illiteracy from 9.6% in 1986 to 22.4% in 2021, leaving 5.5 million Tanzanian citizens unable to read or write (Oddy, 2022). In response, the Government of Tanzania has developed educational programmes targeting adults, youth, and out-of-school children, including the Integrated Community-Based Adult Education (ICBAE) and the Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET), the latter of which caters to out-of-school children and youth (URT, 2021).

Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET) program was established by the government in 1999 to provide education to primary school-aged children who are out of school. The program addresses various reasons for dropout, such as non-friendly learning environments, parental separation, peer pressure, and lack of basic needs. Factors like fear of teachers, illness, pregnancy, and poverty also contribute to dropouts (URT, 2020). Mnubi (2019) likewise observed the circumstances such as poverty, living in remote areas, shyness and discomfort in mixed-age classes as factors leading to dropout. COBET program is implemented in two versions targeting two age groups: Cohort I for children aged 11-13 years and Cohort II for children aged 14-18 years in both rural and urban areas (URT, 2021). It follows the primary school curriculum with adjustments to meet the needs of out-of-school children and includes subjects like communication skills, mathematics, vocational skills, and personality development.

The program lasts for three years, and after completion, children can either return to formal education or pursue other post-primary opportunities (URT, 2018). Attendance is flexible, and uniforms are not required. Cohort I learners progress to Standard 5 after passing the Standard 4 National Examination, while Cohort II learners can access distance learning, vocational training, and secondary education upon passing Primary School Leaving Examinations. In 2024, there were 57,843 learners enrolled in COBET, with 45,642 in Cohort I and 12,201 in Cohort II. The program is facilitated by 2,427 professional teachers who also teach in primary schools, while 833 are volunteers (para- professional teachers) who received special training (URT, 2023). Para-professionals are post-secondary school leavers who volunteer to facilitate teaching in the COBET programme. Both professional and para-professional teachers receive special training on skill facilitation (URT, 2023). Facilitation skills are essential to all teachers for the successful implementation of the COBET program. Facilitation training offers skills to equip teachers with the requisite competencies for handling learners with diverse learning needs specifically those who have dropped out of school. The training moreover is intended to equip

teachers who had prior training from teacher training colleges (TTC) with skills for handling the children under the COBET programme (The Graça Machel Trust, 2023).

COBET is implemented nationwide, with a particular focus on regions with high illiteracy and dropout rates, such as the Mara Region. In 2023, Mara Region had the largest number of COBET centres in the country, with 179 centres. The researchers in this study selected three (3) Districts which are Tarime, Musoma and Rorya Districts because they contain a large number of the children of the program in Mara Region according to the data obtained from the Regional Primary Education Office. To facilitate the program in Mara Region, COBET is coordinated by the Ministry of President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government, the Graça Machel Trust, and the Mara Alliance, which consists of faith-based, non-governmental, community-based organizations, business-women, and responsible individuals (Mbili, 2019). Despite the efforts from both government and non-governmental organizations, many children still drop out of the program before completing their studies. The Information obtained from the Regional Primary Education office (RPE's) for COBET in Mara Region shows that a significant number of children from Cohort I and Cohort II were not mainstreamed into formal education in 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Data, indicate that a total of 686 (45.8%) children from cohort I and 430 (35%) of cohort II of Mara Region dropped from their studies in 2020. Only 813 (54.2%) from cohort I and 796 (64.8%) from cohort II were mainstreamed. In the following year 2021 the same scenario is seen that a total of 601 (50.4%) children from cohort I and 421 (41.8%) of cohort II of Mara Region dropped from their studies in 2021. The data also indicate that only 592 (49.6%) from cohort I and 586 (58.2%) from cohort II were mainstreamed. Similar trend is also observed in the year 2022 that a total of 908 (63.6%) children from cohort I and 349 (38.3%) of cohort II of Mara Region dropped from their studies in 2022 while a total of 519 (36.4%) from cohort I and 558 (61.7%) from cohort II were mainstreamed in formal education. The dropout rates in the consecutive three years raised a concern as to whether teachers employ the facilitative strategies to retain all children under the program or not. These strategies are meant to create a conducive learning environment for COBET beneficiaries. The strategies include shared decision-making, guidance and counselling, motivation, role modelling, coping strategies, and setting individual goals.

This study focused on the practicality of guidance and counselling strategy in enhancing the retention of the children under COBET. Guidance and counselling are among the facilitative strategies identified by UNICEF (2018) to reduce dropout due to issues such as early marriages, drug abuse, and other problems that were seen as indicative of a lack of educational awareness among parents, children, and communities. Mwogela (2023) advocated strengthening guidance and counselling units, creating a conducive learning

environment, and providing female role models to help control female students' dropouts. Counselling and gaining a more in-depth understanding of children's reasons for dropping out and expectations about schooling are keys to orienting them toward the most appropriate learning track (Valencia et al., 2021). This orientation, which Teachers facilitate, could have retained them in their learning. The issue is whether the Teachers employ guidance and counselling to enhance children's personal growth, encourage them and orient them to the learning track as remedy to what caused them to drop out of school. By so doing, teachers can effectively help the children under the COBET be integrated into learning.

Children under the COBET programme need encouragement from their teachers who are supposed to motivate them. Teachers should collaborate with the pupils to help them understand their situations. In so doing pupils feel valued in schools and this in turn can lead to the realization of their educational goals. Through the use of facilitative strategies, the COBET programme is geared at encouraging more rural out-of-school children to enrol for schooling, be retained in school, and complete their education with the expected learning outcomes. However, the programme has not been able to absorb all out of school children. A report from the Graça Machel Trust (2023), revealed that even the children who had enrolled in the COBET have been dropping out of the programme. This scenario is worrying as what could be the cause of high second dropouts and the low motivation for the children to enrol in the COBET programme.

Ngware et al. (2018) observed that children under the COBET programme are expected to complete their primary education but not prematurely drop out of school. The study recommended that these children be provided with a conducive environment that is supportive of learning and free of discrimination. However, from the foregoing background there felt concern on whether teachers entrusted with children in the COBET programme implement the facilitative skills of guidance and counselling, shared decision making, role modelling and motivation strategies to enhance retention of the children in school. The concern couldn't be cleared without conducting this study. Conducting a study on the practicality of guidance and counselling by teachers in selected Districts in Mara Region was necessary to gain a better understanding of the situation and improve retention rates in COBET.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

Retaining children in the Complementary Basic Education for Tanzania (COBET) program has been a problem that attracts attention. These children face environmental, social, and economic challenges that often lead them to dropping out of school (Mrisho, 2017). It was indicated by Mnubi (2019) that bullying and a lack of sensitivity towards COBET children have been identified as factors that contribute to their drop outs. That non-Formal Education programs aimed at providing quality basic education to out-of-

school children in Tanzania have proven ineffective in ensuring their successful transition to formal primary schools. The Graça Machel Trust foundation (2023) warned that without addressing these issues, children would miss the opportunity to enrol, attend school consistently, and complete their education. Even though the main goal of establishing the programs is to facilitate mainstreaming learners to formal primary schools, only a small number of the registered learners get mainstreamed. Most of the learners either repeat the same course for many years or end up dropping out of it before getting mainstreamed into formal primary schools.

Concerns from parents and the community about high dropout rates in COBET remain, as the government's goal of achieving 100% literacy also remain a nightmare. Several studies such as Mnubi (2019), Kombo (2019), Scharpf et al. (2021), Samwel (2021) addressed the strategy to tackle these challenges, including redrawing the COBET map, alternative learning classes, and interventions to reduce violence by teachers. However, it is unclear on the practicality of guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of COBET children. Therefore, this study investigated the practicality of guidance and counselling strategy used by teachers to enhance the retention of children in the COBET program in the selected Districts in Mara Region.

➤ *Research Question and Hypothesis*

- One research question and one hypothesis guided the study.

How do Teachers employ guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of children under complementary basic education in selected Districts of Mara Region?

- H₁: There is a significant difference between the mean scores of professional and para-professional teachers in employing guidance and counselling strategy to enhance retention of the children under complementary basic education in the selected Districts of Mara Region.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded on Vincent Tinto's Institutional Departure theory of dropout, which views dropout as a long-term process influenced by various interactions between individuals, academic and social systems. The theory emphasizes that personal attributes, such as sex, race, ability, family background, social status, and values, impact students' performance, goals, and commitments to school. Tinto also highlights external factors like discrimination that can affect students' decision to continue studying. The theory's strengths lie in its comprehensive coverage of variables like individual goals and commitments, which suggest that guidance from teachers and motivation can help prevent dropout. However, the theory has a weakness in its limited explanation of other variables, particularly the specific personal attributes of

children enrolled in the COBET program. The theory guided study in the formulation of research questions related to use of the facilitative strategies particularly motivation and shared decision making to enhance retention of the children under COBET. The mixed methods in this study was determined to allow a comprehensive understanding on the use of the strategies to enhance retention in the programme. The methods of data collection were determined where the questionnaires were utilized to gather quantitative data on the use of the strategies to enhance retention. The interviews and Focus Group discussion guides was used to capture a detailed narratives from head teachers and the children of the programme about the use of the strategies to enhance retention. Quantitative data from teachers' questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to determine the frequencies, percentages and mean score of teachers use of facilitative strategies to enhance retention of the children in COBET.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed thematically to uncover common themes related to institutional challenges and effective use of the strategies. Findings were interpreted to show how specific facilitative strategies employed by teachers contributing to enhanced retention. Conclusions and recommendations were made to address systemic barriers, improve institutional support, and train teachers in the use of facilitative strategies to enhance retention of the children. By applying Institutional Departure Theory, researchers can gain a nuanced understanding of the composite interplay between institutional factors and student retention, providing valuable insights for improving educational practices in Tanzania's complementary basic education system.

III. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Guidance and counselling strategies are very crucial in educational settings in the course of raising the literacy rate. Teachers through the strategy understand the children and value them to raise their latent capabilities and then their retention is raised.

Mariama & Gibson (2020) conducted a study on school counsellors' role as social justice change agents in addressing the retention of African American males. The study highlighted the higher retention rates among African American students compared to Hispanic and White students and emphasized the need for school counsellors to bridge the existing gaps. The article discussed the educational challenges specific to African American males and explored the relationship between race, culture, and grade retention practices in schools. The study emphasized the use of guidance and counselling strategy to enhance student retention. However, the study's focus on African American males raised awareness of biases in educational support provided by school counsellors, indicating the importance of addressing the retention of all genders without discrimination.

Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate how guidance and counselling strategy are employed by teachers to enhance the retention of children in complementary basic education, regardless of their gender.

Ijeoma & Oyaziwo (2019) conducted a study on the role of counselling and government policy in repositioning girl child education in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State. The study found that government policies play a crucial role in effecting positive changes and enhancing girls' education. The study suggested that training counsellors, providing them with working tools and facilities, and ensuring that each school has a counsellor focused on counselling girls at risk of dropping out and those denied access to basic education could increase girls' enrolment in schools. The study provided valuable insights into the use of guidance counselling and its effectiveness in safeguarding girls at risk of dropping out of school through government policies. However, without the efforts and commitment of teachers in implementing guidance and counselling strategy, such policies may not yield the desired results. Students may continue to drop out despite the availability of counselling tools. Additionally, the previous study focused solely on girls' dropouts, while the current study considered both boys and girls as victims of school dropout. Furthermore, the current study collected primary data through questionnaires administered to teachers, conducted one-on-one interviews with head teachers, and gathered information through focus group discussions with the children in the program, providing a more comprehensive approach to data collection.

Custodio & O'Loughlin (2020) did a study on students with interrupted formal education, emphasizing their unique needs and the importance of specialized programming and assistance. These students often arrive unaccompanied as teenagers and require academic catch-up as a priority. Meeting their emotional, psychological, and physiological needs is crucial before they can fully engage in the educational setting. The study highlighted the need for schools to provide literacy instruction in both the students' home language and English, fill gaps in content knowledge, and support their social and emotional well-being. The study provided valuable information to the current study, emphasizing the need for specialized programs and assistance for students with interrupted formal education. Additionally, it highlighted the importance of addressing students' emotional and psychological needs. The current study sought to investigate how teachers employ guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of children in complementary basic education in selected districts of the Mara Region. The study aims to bridge the gap by conducting an empirical study instead of relying solely on library research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the problem and obtaining participants' views.

Kiminza et al. (2021) conducted a study on the organization of teaching and learning environments in low-cost boarding primary schools (LCBPs) in Kajiado County, Kenya. The study employed sequential mixed methods, cross-sectional, and case study designs and involved pupils, teachers, head teachers, education officials, and representatives of development partners as participants. The study revealed that the existing LCBPs did not meet the educational needs of the nomadic and pastoral communities in Kajiado County. The education curriculum was found to lack appreciation for the nomadic way of life, cultural respect, and preservation of traditional systems of knowledge and skills. The study recommended the rehabilitation and equipping of LCBPs with facilities that align with the needs and aspirations of the nomadic-pastoral way of life.

The study by Kiminza et al. (2021) highlighted the mismatch between the existing educational programs and the needs of children from nomadic and pastoral communities. However, it suggested that these needs could be addressed through guidance and counselling, which involves understanding and supporting the children's mind-set to create a comfortable learning environment. The study provided useful information on guidance and counselling as a means to enhance the retention of children in complementary basic education. However, it did not clearly delineate the responsibility of teachers in meeting the needs of children through guidance and counselling. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate how teachers employ guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of children in complementary basic education in selected districts of the Mara Region.

Valverde et al. (2020) conducted a study on the role of creativity in guidance and career counselling. The study highlighted the importance of creativity as a life skill and its integration into discussions of career counselling. It explored various perspectives from the French guidance counselling literature and emphasized the expansion of the field's mission from helping students make career choices to providing individuals with the skills and perspective to build their own life projects. The study argued that understanding and developing an individual's creativity is crucial in this expanded vision of career counselling. The study brought in an insight on the significance of career guidance and counselling in equipping individuals with skills and perspectives for building their lives. However, it was limited to a literature review, which restricted the inclusion of respondents' views and feelings. To address this gap, the current study was conducted in an actual setting to examine how teachers employ guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of children in complementary basic education in selected districts of the Mara Region.

Doe et al. (2022) explored the reasons for secondary school students' dropout in peri-urban communities of Zanzibar, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative

approach, using case study design and purposive sampling. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 17 teachers and heads of schools. The findings revealed several factors contributing to dropout, including distance to school, academic challenges, poverty, engagement in economic activities, language barriers, indiscipline, and community factors. The study also highlighted interventions such as counselling, establishing English clubs, and community engagement to address dropout. The study shed light on the interventions used to minimize dropout challenges, including counselling, although it focused on secondary schools. However, the study did not include students' perspectives on how they could be helped through guidance and counselling strategy. Additionally, the qualitative approach limited the number of respondents. In contrast, the current study aimed to bridge these gaps by involving all key stakeholders, employing a mixed approach, and investigating how teachers employ guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of children in complementary basic education in selected districts of the Mara Region.

➤ *Demonstration of Knowledge Gap*

The reviewed studies emphasized the importance of guidance and counselling strategy in addressing dropout rates among children from low-income backgrounds, particularly those with interrupted formal education. However, certain limitations were identified, such as the exclusion of boys' perspectives, reliance on library research without direct study, inadequate exploration of teachers' responsibilities, and the omission of students' viewpoints. To address these gaps, the current empirical study investigated how teachers incorporate guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of all children, irrespective of gender, in the Complementary Basic Education (COBET) program within selected districts of the Mara Region. By employing a mixed approach and including key stakeholders, including students, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue and the unique role teachers play in meeting children's needs through guidance and counselling.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed mixed research approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data in order to address the research question and hypothesis and gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem at hand. The study employed a convergent design, which integrated the collection and analysis of both types of data in a single phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 99 COBET centres, 99 head teachers, 133 teachers, and 898 children under the COBET program in selected districts of the Mara Region. The sample size was determined based on the recommendations of Creswell and Clark (2018) and Yamane formula with 30 COBET centres, 14 head teachers, 54 teachers, and 90 children under COBET, making a total of 158 respondents. Both probability and non-probability sampling

techniques were used including critical case purposive sampling for teachers, simple random sampling for COBET centres and head teachers, and stratified random sampling for children under COBET.

The researcher in data collection employed both quantitative and qualitative instruments, such as questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussion guides, was employed. Validity of the instruments was established by seeking the input of three research experts from Mwenge Catholic University, including one expert in the field of Education Planning and Administration. The reliability of the instruments was tested using the Cronbach Alpha technique for rating scale questions in the teachers' questionnaire, yielding a reliability output of 0.802. The reliability of qualitative data was ensured through triangulation of information and peer review. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 and presented in tables, including means, frequencies, and percentages. The hypothesis was tested using an Independent t-test at a significance level of .05. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes from the transcribed data, aiding in the interpretation and discussion of the findings and presented through narrations

and supported by direct quotations. The researcher ensured ethical considerations including permissions, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and acknowledging all cited works to avoid plagiarism.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study sought to find out how guidance and counselling strategy is applied by teachers in enhancing the retention of children under COBET program. The responses were collected from the head teachers, teachers, and children in the COBET program. The study used a Likert scale, and teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement regarding the practicality of the strategy. The responses in Table 1 are summarized into mean scores, following the approach proposed by Hashim et al. (2022). Mean scores between 4.30 and 5.00 were interpreted as a very high level of agreement, scores between 3.50 and 4.29 indicated a high level of agreement, scores between 2.70 and 3.49 were considered moderate, scores between 1.90 and 2.69 is low, and 1.00-1.89 is a very low level of agreement. The responses of strongly agree and agree were combined as agree, while strongly disagree and disagree were categorized as disagree.

Table 1 Teachers' Responses on the Use of Guidance and Counselling Strategy to Enhance the Retention of COBET Children

	Respondent	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	Grand mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	M	
i. Through guidance and counselling I gain an in-depth understanding of children's specific reasons for dropping out of school	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	2	13	11	69	3	19	4.06	4.1
	Professional	0	0	2	7	0	0	20	67	8	27	4.13	
ii. Through guidance and counselling I gain in-depth understanding of children's expectations about their school in enhancing their retention	Para-professional	0	0	4	25	4	25	7	44	1	6	3.31	3.6
	professional	0	0	4	17	3	13	14	47	7	23	3.80	
iii. Through guidance and counselling I provide career exploration interventions that allow children to develop a higher levels of career awareness to enhance their retention	Para-professional	0	0	9	56	3	19	2	13	2	13	2.81	2.9
	professional	1	3	9	30	7	23	13	43	0	0	3.07	
iv. Through guidance and counselling I introduce an intentional (purpose) learning to enhance retention of COBET children.	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	1	6	11	69	4	25	4.19	4.1
	professional	0	0	2	7	3	10	17	57	8	27	4.03	
v. Through guidance and counselling I increase children's aspirations for the future to enhance retention of COBET children.	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	69	5	31	4.31	4.3
	professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	67	10	33	4.33	

vi. Through guidance and counselling I value children's experiences to enhance their retention.	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	1	6	7	44	8	50	4.44	4.3
	professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	67	10	33	4.33	
vii. Through guidance and counselling I orient children toward the most appropriate learning track (pathway) to enhance their retention	Para-professional	0	0	2	13	0	0	11	69	3	19	3.94	4.0
	professional	0	0	2	7	1	3	21	70	6	20	4.03	
viii. Through guidance and counselling I embrace new orientations of success to enhance children's retention	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	75	4	25	4.25	4.0
	Professional	0	0	2	7	1	3	22	73	5	17	4.00	
ix. Through guidance and counselling I create a space that promotes children's abilities to enhance their retention	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	88	2	13	4.13	4.1
	professional	0	0	1	3	0	0	21	70	8	27	4.20	
x. Through guidance and counselling I assist in self-growth to enhance retention of COBET children.	Para-professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	75	4	25	4.25	4.3
	Professional	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	60	12	40	4.40	
Grand mean	Para-professional											3.97	3.97
	Professional											4.03	

Source: Field data 2023

Key: f=Number of respondents and %=Percentages, n = Number of Respondents: Professional teachers' n = 30, Para-professional teachers' n = 16

The data in Table 1 indicate that both para-professional and professional teachers (88% and 94% respectively) who participated in the study maintained that using guidance and counselling helped them gain an in-depth understanding of the specific reasons why the children under COBET dropped out of school, thereby facilitating their retention in the program. The data collected on this item generated a mean of 4.1, implying that teachers strongly agreed that guidance and counselling made them aware of the reasons behind children's dropout from the education system. The teachers' strong agreement on the use of guidance and counselling as a strategy is expected to enhance the retention of children in the COBET program. The researcher also interviewed head teachers of the sampled COBET centers regarding the use of guidance and counselling to enhance retention. One of the interviewed head teachers supported the views expressed by the teachers by saying:

I make efforts through guidance and counselling to know the specific reasons for children to be out of the system when they are enrolled to be able to help them, thus reducing the probability of them dropping out of school (Head Teacher 1, Interview, 14th August, 2023).

Knowing the specific reasons for the children's dropouts could have a significant impact on helping them realize their educational goals. This is because if the teachers are aware of these reasons, it provides a solid foundation for assisting the children carefully without disappointing them in their

education journey. Head Teacher 3 also expressed a similar response on the reasons for the children's dropout during the interview, saying: *"Knowing the reason for children's dropout has been very helpful to us teachers, for we know how to deal with them in different situations through guidance and counselling, and so reducing the possibility of them dropping out again"* (Head Teacher 3, Interview, 16th August, 2023). This indicates that the head teachers recognize the importance of teachers knowing the reasons for the children's dropout, as it puts them in a good position to help the children through guidance and counselling and support them in realizing their educational goals.

Similarly, Head Teacher 11 echoed the same responses on this issue during an interview, emphasizing the significance of understanding the underlying reasons for the children's dropout. During a one on one interview the head teacher had this say:

We must make an effort through guidance and counselling to understand the specific reasons these children drop out of the normal education system as we receive them. This is not an easy job because they are usually not ready to share their story. However, our efforts have always been fruitful (Head Teacher 11, Interview, 28th August 2023).

The views from the head teachers and teachers revealed that teachers take time to enhance the retention of the children under the COBET program by deeply understanding the

specific reasons for their dropout through guidance and counselling strategy. This signifies the essential role of teachers as facilitators in the process of helping the children entrusted to them under the program. Teachers guide the process through guidance, counselling, and interaction between the individual, academic, and social aspects of the children. According to The Graça Machel Trust (2023), the COBET program does not offer adequate psychosocial support to the learners, as some may be orphaned, teenage mothers, or living with structural violence in their households. This gap can be addressed through the guidance and counselling strategy, which allows teachers to deeply understand the challenging situations encountered by the children.

The data in Table 1 shows that 50% of para-professional and 70% of the professional teachers who participated in the study agreed that they gained an in-depth understanding of the children's expectations about their schooling through the guidance and counselling strategy, which helped enhance their retention. However, 25% of para-professional teachers and 17% of professional teachers indicated that they were not in a position to gain an in-depth understanding of the children's expectations about their schooling through the guidance and counselling strategy. The mean score of 3.6 suggests that most teachers take the time to deeply understand the children's expectations about their schooling through guidance and counselling to enhance their retention.

When the children were approached to share their views on how guidance and counselling enhanced their retention, they did not support the teachers' perspectives. One of the groups engaged in the intergroup discussion stated, "*Our expectations are not well understood by teachers, for some of them have no time for us because they are busy with other classes they teach*" (FGD 1, Group Discussion, 14th August, 2023). This indicates that teachers, in fulfilling their duties, may not be able to fully explore the expectations of the children under the program to enhance their retention. This could suggest that teachers have less time to engage with the children in the program due to other school responsibilities, which can cause the children to feel undervalued and lead to dropout before being mainstreamed into formal education.

Another group of children supported their fellow learners by providing a possible reason for their teachers' inability to attend to them:

It is not easy for teachers to know our expectations other than teaching us, and we have little time to discuss our lives with them. This is because they have different classes to teach, marking and other responsibilities as teachers (FGD 5, Group discussion, 23rd August 2023).

The response provided by FGD5 indicates that teachers in the COBET program are often overwhelmed with their various responsibilities, leaving little room for more personalized interactions with the children to understand their

needs and expectations. This suggests that teachers are primarily focused on delivering the teaching content rather than engaging with the children's lived experiences. This disconnection can make it difficult for teachers to fully meet the needs and expectations of the children in the program, potentially leading to further dropout.

During a focus group discussion with the children in the program, one participant expressed, "*Teachers do not meet our expectations because we are not courageous enough to face them and share with them. This situation is discouraging us to continue with school*" (FDG 3, Group discussion, 18th August, 2023). This reaction reveals that the children do not have enough courage to interact with their teachers and share their expectations for retention, which could impact their continued participation in the program if they do not feel adequately supported.

➤ *When interviewed, Head Teacher 4 acknowledged:*

We know that it is our responsibility as teachers to spend more time understanding the expectations of COBET children. Most of the time, we do not fulfil this responsibility because of the other duties we have with the rest of the pupils. This is because teachers in this programme are doing extra work apart from the regular classes assigned to them (Head Teacher 4, Interview, 17th August, 2023).

This response suggests that teachers in the program recognize their responsibility to invest more time in comprehending the specific needs and expectations of children under COBET, but they often cannot fulfill this due to their additional duties related to the rest of the pupils.

➤ *Similarly, Head Teacher 8 stated:*

If we had the means of making our para-professional teacher available all the time, it could have been of great help to this group, for they would have much time to offer. Unfortunately, our meagre school budget cannot afford it (Head Teacher 8, Interview, 23rd August, 2023).

This indicates that the professional teachers are overwhelmed with their responsibilities, such as having other classes, which deters them from paying full attention to the COBET children. This could impact the children's retention when they feel their expectations are not met.

The findings from the children and head teachers suggest that most teachers cannot dedicate sufficient time to these children due to other school responsibilities in formal education. This contrasts with what the teachers reported in questionnaires, suggesting they may have presented a more favorable picture to avoid acknowledging the truth that they were not effectively employing guidance and counseling strategy to enhance the children's retention. The situation does not align with the Path-Goal Theory of House (1971), which emphasizes the leader's (teacher's) role in creating a clear path

for the students to achieve their desired outcomes through a deep understanding of their needs and expectations. The findings indicate a disconnect between this theory and the reality faced by the children in COBET program.

From the data in Table 1, 43% of para-professional and professional teachers who participated in the study indicated that they did not provide career exploration interventions to allow the children to develop a higher level of career awareness to enhance their retention. Conversely, only 37% of teachers reported that they provided career exploration interventions that allowed children to develop a greater level of career awareness to improve their retention. The teachers' responses on this item yielded a mean score of 2.9, suggesting that most teachers were unaware of this aspect for enhancing the retention of COBET children.

This aligned with the response provided by the children in COBET during their focus group discussions on this item. The children expressed: *"We are unclear about our future career since our teachers have not guided us. However, we have a strong desire to receive support and be developed on this aspect"* (FGD 6, Group discussion, 25th August, 2023). This indicates that the children were not guided on their career development for their retention, which could lead to a loss of focus on their studies and potential dropouts. Another group of children was enthusiastic about the prospect of career guidance, stating: *"we are happy to hear that there is such intervention which will be very helpful for us so that we don't drop again and that we work for our future"* (FGD 7, Group discussion, 28th August, 2023). The response in FGD 7 reveals the desire of the children under COBET for career guidance and counselling strategy from their teachers.

Additionally, a different group expressed their ambitions for career development, saying: *"Some of us would wish to get far, but we didn't know if it is possible because nobody had ever told us about this good news for our career"* (FGD 9, Group discussion, 31st August, 2023). The responses from FGD 9 indicate the aspirations of these children, which could have been nurtured through teacher-led guidance and counselling. The findings suggest that teachers did not properly employ guidance and counselling strategy despite the importance of increasing the children's future aspirations and, consequently, their retention. Studies highlights the significance of providing career exploration interventions that focus on intentional learning to develop a higher level of career awareness and increase future aspirations (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Valverde et al., 2020). Based on the findings, there is conflicting information regarding what the teachers and students say about providing career exploration interventions to allow the children to develop a higher level of career awareness. Since the children are the focus of the programme and are the more affected subjects, their information can be valued as the basis of the reality to support them.

The data from Table 1 show that the overwhelmed majority (94%) of para-professionals and all (100%) professional teachers who participated in the study indicated that through guidance and counseling strategy, they valued the experiences of the children to enhance their retention. The mean score of 4.3 on this item suggests that teachers were highly attuned to the life experiences of the children in COBET, which helped to improve their retention. The findings suggest that teachers employed guidance and counseling strategy by valuing the experiences of COBET children for their retention, in line with Vincent Tinto's 1975 Institutional Departure theory of dropout. This theory posits that dropping out of an educational institution can be seen as a process, where the individual's experience in these systems shapes their goals (intention) and commitment (motivation), which may ultimately lead to dropout decisions.

This was supported by the comments of one head teacher, who confirmed that *"most COBET children had faced significant difficulties, including family separation, which led to irregular school attendance and even dropout"* (Head Teacher 7, Interview, 22nd August, 2023). The head teachers acknowledged these challenges and tried to address them by deeply understanding and valuing the children's experiences through guidance and counseling strategy. Another head teacher explained that:

Most COBET children come from low-income families with limited means to support their education. Through guidance and counseling, the teachers tried their best to provide the necessary learning resources to help the children feel comfortable and continue with their learning (Head teacher 2, Interview, 15th August 2023).

➤ *Another head teacher emphasized that*

While difficulties are common for all children, COBET children need to be handled carefully as they are going through more difficult moments. By attentively listening to and valuing their experiences, the teachers aimed to prevent these children from dropping out again (Head Teacher 3, Interview, 16th August 2023).

The findings suggest that by valuing the experiences of COBET children, teachers were able to better understand and address the challenges they faced, which in turn enhanced the children's retention in the program. This aligns with the conclusion of Kirk et al. (2019) that to effectively serve children who return to school, we must create a space that promotes their assets and values their experiences, rather than failing them through repeated systemic failure.

The data in Table 1 show that the overwhelmed majority of professional teachers (90%) and all para-professional teachers who participated in the study indicated that through guidance and counseling strategy, they embraced new orientations of success to enhance the children's retention. The mean score of 4.0 on this item suggests that this strategy made

the teachers ready to value any kind of success reached by the COBET children, in order to improve their retention. The teachers' responses were supported by one of the head teachers, who stated, "*We make sure each kind of success is valued, not just to score an 'A' but to get integrated with fellow learners as well*" (Head Teacher 6, Interview, 21st August 2023). This response shows that the teachers ensure various forms of achievement and growth are recognized and valued, rather than placing disproportionate importance on narrow academic performance. Things like interpersonal skills, participation, and engagement with the school are seen as equally valid measures of success. There appears to be a recognition that children have diverse strengths, interests, and learning styles, and valuing a range of success criteria allows the children to feel recognized and comfortable to continue with their education.

Another head teacher commented on the importance of embracing new ways of defining success, stating, "*We embrace new ways of success because every child is different from the others and learns differently. So we appreciate any success a child reaches so that she/he may progress each day*" (Head Teacher 5, Interview, 18th August 2023). This observation indicates the openness of teachers in recognizing and valuing alternative forms of achievement and progress that may not fit the conventional mold, and allowing children to progress at their own pace and in their own way. This suggests an understanding that pupils have diverse strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles that should be acknowledged. Embracing new ways of defining and measuring success creates an inclusive, supportive environment where all the children can feel recognized and empowered to develop to their fullest potential. This approach aims to reduce dropout by acknowledging and celebrating even small steps forward, rather than solely focusing on reaching a predetermined level of performance.

➤ *Another head teacher responded that:*

We usually embrace each kind of success for COBET children because they are different from other children in formal education in terms of their way of learning, and they are delicate; they need to be encouraged every time so that they don't despair (Head Teacher 3, Interview, 16th August 2023).

The response by HT3 indicates that the children in COBET require special consideration and support because they differ from those in formal education due to their unique learning styles and sensitivity. Celebrating their achievements and providing constant encouragement is important to prevent them from losing hope or being discouraged. The findings suggest that the strategy of guidance and counseling is employed by teachers to embrace new orientations of success for the retention of COBET children, as was emphasized by (Kirk et al., 2019). Kirk et al. (2019) argued that by embracing new orientations of success, adult schools can work to engage,

retain, empower, and further prepare the children while shifting the narrative of adult students.

From the data in Table 1, teachers' responses indicated that all teachers (100%), through guidance and counseling, assisted the children under COBET in self-growth to enhance their retention. The mean score of 4.3 generated from teachers' responses suggests that teachers were aware that these children were growing and needed help with their self-awareness and how to be responsible citizens. This was confirmed by one of the head teachers, who said, "*Children are growing up with so many challenges because of their adolescent age, and we need to assist them in their self-growth through guidance and counselling. This makes them feel valued, so they continue their studies without dropping out*" (Head teacher 2, Interview, 15th August, 2023). This response implies that teachers were aware of the difficulties these children faced due to their age and that guidance and counseling were necessary to address these challenges and retain the children.

Another head teacher insisted, "*We have to help these children in their growth so that they become independent in solving their life challenges because by doing so they continue with their education*" (Head Teacher 8, Interview, 23rd August 2023). This suggests that teachers were working hard to help the COBET children so that their difficulties would not cause them to drop out of school. One more head teacher added, "*At this stage of growth, children continually need guidance and counselling to continue their studies smoothly*" (Head Teacher 4, Interview, 17th August 2023).

This response implies that teachers, through guidance and counseling strategy, were able to help the children towards self-growth. The findings suggest that assisting COBET children in self-growth is done by teachers through guidance and counseling strategy to enhance their retention. This is because during guidance and counseling, the children are helped to solve their problems by turning them into opportunities for their growth. This corresponds to the findings of Kirk et al. (2019) that facilitators played a unique role in the lives of their students and oriented success as self-growth and agency. In stressing the importance of encouraging self-growth, Chano et al. (2022) stated that enhancing life skills and personal growth should encourage students to develop their learning.

Generally, it was found that through the guidance and counselling strategy, all teachers (professional and para-professional) gained an in-depth understanding of children's specific reasons for dropping out of school and valued children's experiences to enhance their retention. Teachers also indicated that they embraced new orientations of success and assisted COBET children in self-growth to enhance their retention. This implies that, as regards the aspects mentioned above, teachers were appropriately employing guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of COBET children. On the other hand, it was revealed that teachers did

not employ guidance and counselling strategy to provide career exploration interventions that allow COBET children to develop a higher level of career awareness to enhance their retention. Likewise, it was revealed that although teachers felt they gained an in-depth understanding of children's expectations about their school, COBET children showed dissatisfaction with this item. The implication here is that, concerning these aspects, the strategy was not properly employed by teachers despite its importance in enhancing the retention of COBET children.

It is essential to note that the overall mean score of the data from teachers' responses was found to be 3.97. This connotes a high level of agreement that teachers employed guidance and counselling strategy to enhance children's retention under COBET. However, the program has not realized its objectives as expected, as long as there are still significant dropouts of COBET children from schools in Selected Districts in Mara Region, as highlighted by Leonard et al. (2022) that the program delivery in COBET is still wanting and needs some improvement.

➤ Hypothesis Testing

To triangulate the information from teachers, head teachers and the children under COBET on the practicality of guidance and counselling strategy, the researcher tested the

hypotheses. The hypotheses sought to establish if there was a significant difference between the agreements' mean scores of professional and para-professional teachers in employing guidance and counselling strategy to enhance retention of the children under the COBET programme in the selected Districts of Mara Region. The study used the agreement mean scores of both independent groups to test the hypothesis and the results are summarised in Table 2.

Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference between the agreement mean scores of professional and para-professional teachers in employing guidance and counselling strategy to enhance retention of the children under complementary basic education in the Selected Districts in Mara Region.

Before testing the hypothesis, the researcher checked the normality test using Shapiro Wilk and found that the p-values (0.166 and 0.074) were greater than the significant level of .05. This meant that the data was normally distributed, and the researcher proceeded with hypothesis testing. Moreover, the researcher tested the homoscedasticity using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and found that the p-value (0.384) was greater than the significant level of .05. This meant that equal variances were assumed. A decision rule determined the hypothesis testing.

Table 2 The Difference between the Agreements' Mean Scores of Professional and Para-Professional Teachers Employing Guidance and Counselling Strategy to Enhance Retention of the Children under COBET

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Guidance and counselling	Equal variances assumed	.797	.384	.311	18	.759	.06300	.20245	-.36233	.48833
	Equal variances are not assumed.			.311	16.707	.760	.06300	.20245	-.36470	.49070

Source: Field data 2023

Table 2 shows that $t(10) = 0.311$, $p = 0.759$. The data indicated that the p-value is greater than the significant level (.05). Since the p-value is greater than the significant level, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the agreement mean scores of professional and para-professional teachers in employing guidance and counselling strategy to enhance the retention of the children under complementary basic education in the selected Districts of Mara Region. This means that all program teachers employ the strategy in the same way, which could have helped the children achieve their educational goals. It was expected that professional teachers would do better in the use of the strategy since they underwent training on the

strategy during their professional training. This might be attributed to them being busy with other school responsibilities. If their ways of operations are the same, it can be suggested that they add up the efforts on the use of the strategy. However, since there are still dropouts of the children, it signifies that the strategy is not properly employed to enhance the retention of the children under COBET. If so, the children couldn't have dropped out at such a rate. This implies that what teachers indicated on the practicality of guidance and counselling was what they thought was its use.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that Guidance and counselling strategy is employed by teachers to enhance children's retention in the programme although with some deficiencies.

Since both professional and para-professional teachers apply the guidance and counselling strategy equally in enhancing the retention of the children under complementary basic education, the professional teachers are not fulfilling their due in employing the strategy as expected.

The head teachers should continuously encourage teachers to use facilitative strategies through meetings and workshops monthly to enhance the retention of children under COBET.

Teachers should seek to update their knowledge on the use of facilitative strategies through self-life-long learning by attending the trainings, seminars and workshops for the enhancement of retention of children under COBET.

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