

# **GROUP OBEDIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC COUNSELING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BOYS AND GIRLS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THARAKA- NITHI COUNTY, KENYA**

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## **Abstract**

*This study sought to establish the impact of group obedience on academic counseling by comparing boys and girls in public secondary schools in Tharaka- Nithi County, Kenya. Causal- comparative research design was employed in this study. The accessible population was 9,419 form three students from public secondary schools in the county. A total of 14 schools were sampled using stratified sampling technique while simple random sampling was used to select 25 student respondents from each of the sampled schools. A sample of 350 respondents was involved in this study: 175 boys and 175 girls. Data was collected through a students' questionnaire. Validity of the instrument was ensured through judgments of research experts and scholars in the related area of study. Reliability of the instrument was estimated through a pilot study and the minimum threshold for reliability of the instrument was set at alpha 0.7. A reliability coefficient of 0.81 was got from the students' questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were used to analyze data, while inferential statistics of a t- test was used to test the hypothesis. Hypothesis was tested at a significant level of alpha 0.05. Data analysis was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for windows. A summary was used to organize qualitative data. It is recommended that teacher counselors intensify academic counseling programs by organizing sessions for various groups among students regardless of gender on how group obedience impacts on academic counseling.*

**Key words:** Group obedience, Academic Counseling, Gender

## **Introduction**

Academic counseling is one of the major services that secondary school students require in their pursuit for academic excellence since students often make misinformed decisions on how to handle challenges in schoolwork (Gladding, 2004). This form of counseling is successful when teacher counselors hold face-to-face appointments with students (Hattie, 2009). Problems such as mental health issues, inappropriate study skills, poor time management and learning difficulties demand students to seek academic counseling (Sikolia & Lutomia, 2002). According to Schmidt (2003), students place more importance on the supportive and caring nature of their relationship with their counselors than on the particular approach to counseling. Thus, participation in academic counseling increase students' satisfaction and mitigate students' feelings of isolation or disconnection from the institutions as a whole (Pandey, 2005). As a result, students may feel strengthened to pursue on their academic endeavors. A study by Wanjiru (2003) on assessment of organization and implementation of guidance and counseling programs in secondary schools showed that poor utilization of academic counseling in learning institutions led to students' academic problems going unaddressed and therefore negatively affecting academic performance. Another study by Silbert and Lake (2012) on peer assisted learning in teaching clinical examination to junior medical students revealed that males had lower extents of discussing academic issues with teacher counselors than females.

Human beings have been shown to be obedient in the presence of perceived legitimate authority figures (Burger, Girgis & Manning, 2011). Such authorities include orders by police officers, decisions by judges, directives by corporate executives and exhortations by clergymen. Authority figures exercise power only by virtue of the role that they occupy in a social group (Huffman, 2002). For instance, authority figures in students' groups are the group leaders who may command group members to seek or not seek academic counseling. In exercising authority, an authority figure invokes a norm and thereby obliges the targets to comply (Macionis, 2005). The greater the number of persons the authority figure can directly or indirectly influence, in this manner, and the wider the range of behaviors over which the authority figure has jurisdiction, the greater their authority within the group (Stark, 2004). A field study by Geffner and Gross in 1984 on sex- role behavior and obedience to authority investigated obedience by males and females (Tischler, 2004). The findings of the study revealed that more females than males fell victim of obedience. Thus, it is likely for male students to obey their group leaders at a lower extent than females in seeking or not seeking academic counseling. Group obedience to authority frequently produces beneficial results, for it facilitates coordination among persons in groups or collective settings (Wingfield, 2003). Yet if obedience to authority is questioning, it can sometimes produce disquieting or undesirable outcomes (Wade & Tavris, 2005). In some cases, group obedience to authority can produce very negative consequences especially if the orders involve actions that are questionable or reprehensible (Schaefer, 2002). Group obedience among students may produce negative consequences like lack of academic improvement if group leaders command members not to seek academic counseling.

According to Colman (2009), some system of authority is a requirement of all communal living, and it is only the person dwelling in isolation who is not forced to respond, through defiance or submission to the commands of others. Therefore, it is inevitable for group members among students to be led by group leaders and thereby obey these leaders. The group leaders demand obedience to seek or not seek academic counseling from group members. Thus, the nature of group leadership determines whether students seek or do not seek academic counseling. Group obedience is further affected when participants are under direct surveillance by the person issuing orders; when participants are distant from rather than close to the victim and when participants are transmitters rather than expectants of a command (Macionis, 2005). Females obey with surveillance more than males whereas surveillance does not affect male's obedience (Sherif & Sherif, 2003). One difficulty for women as they attempt to lead is that traditional leadership behaviors such as showing independence and exerting power over others conflict with the expected social roles for women (Lamberton & Kartz, 2012). According to Brown (2008), females are socialized in their societies to be more obedient and follow instructions than males. Hiral (2015) affirms that group obedience is higher in females than males due to the social roles into which females are expected to obey their husbands. Therefore, group obedience towards academic counseling may be shown more to male than female group leaders. This outcome could have certain impact on students' acts of seeking or not seeking academic counseling.

## **Objective**

The objective of this study was to establish the impact of group obedience on academic counseling by comparing boys and girls in public secondary schools in Tharaka- Nithi County, Kenya.

## **Research Methodology**

This study was a descriptive research which employed causal- comparative research design. This research design was appropriate for this study because two groups; that is, boys and girls were used to bring out a comparison on the impact that group obedience has on academic counseling. This study was carried out in Tharaka- Nithi County, Kenya. The population of the study was drawn from an accessible population of 9,419 form three students from public secondary schools in Tharaka- Nithi County (County Education Officer (CEO), Tharaka- Nithi County, 2015). The sample size of this study was 350 respondents which comprised of 175 boys and 175 girls. Stratified sampling procedure was used to sample 14 schools proportionately from the 142 public secondary schools according to sub- county categories. In addition, random sampling was applied to select 25 form three student respondents from each of the sampled schools.

The researcher used a students' questionnaire to collect the desired data for the study. The raw data gathered from the field was classified according to the categories of respondents and coded based on the objective of the study. To validate the instrument, the researcher sought expertise assistance from research experts and scholars in the related area of study. Reliability of the instrument was estimated through a pilot study. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was considered reliable if it yielded a minimum threshold

reliability coefficient that was set at alpha 0.7 using Cronbach reliability coefficient. The coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.81. Descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were applied in analysis of data. Inferential statistics of a t- test was used to test the research hypothesis and the test on the hypothesis was done at a significant level of alpha 0.05. The analysis was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for windows. Qualitative data from the open- ended question was organized into a summary. The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from Chuka University and then sought a research permit from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

## **Results and Discussion**

An item in the questionnaire sought to find out the age of respondents and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
Distribution of Students by Age and Gender

Age	Boys		Girls	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
16 years and below	46	26.3	54	30.9
17 years	99	56.6	96	54.8
18 years	21	12.0	20	11.4
19 years and above	9	5.1	5	2.9
Total	175	100.0	175	100.0

The distribution in Table 1 depicts that majority of the students were 17 years old in both genders though higher in boys than girls. Students of 19 years and above were the lowest number although girls were less than boys; an implication that more boys may have been admitted to secondary school at an older age than girls.

Students were required to indicate the groups they belonged to by gender and the findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
Students' Groups by Gender

Group	Boys		Girls	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Religious movement	8	4.6	12	6.9
Co- curricular team	86	49.1	82	46.8
Students' council	7	4.0	5	2.9
Academic discussion	74	42.3	76	43.4
Total	175	100.0	175	100.0

The information in Table 2 indicates low representation of girls in the students' council probably because girls fear losing friends, who they value, once they become members of this group. This view is in line with Lamberton and Kartz (2012) who affirm that traditional leadership behaviors like exerting power over others conflict with the social roles of women. Religious movement had a lower number in males than females. The higher inclination of girls to religious movement is in line with Pew Research Centre (2016) which affirms that women are generally more religious than men, particularly among Christians. Students' council featured lastly with the lowest number of respondents among the four groups, with a lower percentage in females than males.

Information on group obedience and its impact on academic counseling were got from students' questionnaire. The findings on the impact of group obedience on academic counseling are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Students’ Position on Group Obedience and its Impact on Academic Counseling

Theme	N	Boys		Girls	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Obey leader like group members do	175	2.57	1.4479	3.411	1.3112
Seek counseling against own will to please group leader	175	2.17	1.2450	3.36	1.3731
Obey leader in order to create harmony	175	2.60	1.3808	3.52	1.3631
Consult counselor only when leader commands	175	1.89	1.1756	2.66	1.4807
Like opinions of members to obey leader	175	2.04	1.1036	2.76	1.4818
Strictly adhere to leader’s commands	175	2.44	1.4228	2.73	1.2968
Commend leader’s commands	175	2.27	1.3618	2.45	1.5090
Fail to seek counseling since leader warns against seeking	175	1.94	1.0433	2.60	1.3804
Obey leader to avoid punishment	175	1.89	1.2692	2.77	1.3953
Obey leader’s commands if members also do it	175	2.55	1.5112	3.55	1.2517
Valid N (Listwise)	175				

Results depicted in Table 3 on the impact of group obedience on academic counseling among boys and girls reveal the levels to which students obeyed their group leaders. Respondents were required to indicate the level to which they often agreed with what the group leader said about seeking or not seeking academic counseling. The students indicated the levels of their agreement about seeking academic counseling to please the group leaders. Findings from these items suggested a low and moderate impact of group obedience on academic counseling respectively in boys and girls. This higher trend in females to obey leaders more than males is in line with Brown (2008) who asserts that socialization of females in societies expects them to be more obedient and follow instructions than males.

Respondents indicated agreement on their strict adherence to group leaders’ suggestions about seeking or not seeking academic counseling. An item required respondents to indicate their agreement on their failure to seek academic counseling because group leaders warned members against seeking this counseling service. Results from these two items revealed that group obedience caused low and moderate impact in boys and girls respectively. These views are supported by Hiral (2015) who declares that group obedience is higher in females than males due to the social roles into which females are expected obey their husbands. A t- test was done to establish differences in the impact of group obedience on academic counseling between boys and girls. This comparison is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of T- test Results on the Impact of Group Obedience on Academic Counseling

Category	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T- value	Df	P- value
Group obedience	Boys	175	2.38	0.4217	-3.834	346	0.855
	Girls	175	3.06	0.3790			

The information in Table 4 indicates the results of the t- test done to establish differences in the impact of group obedience between boys and girls. The results reveal a p- value of 0.855 which indicated a value higher than the value at alpha 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted and it was concluded that there is no statistical significant difference in the impact of group obedience on academic counseling between boys and girls. These results are supported by Burger (2009) from a study he conducted on differences in group obedience between men and women which found no difference in obedience between both genders. It was concluded that both genders exhibit similar behavior, suggesting that group obedience occur independent of gender. However, a field study by Geffner and Gross in 1984 on sex- role behavior and obedience to authority investigated group obedience by males and females and found out more females than males were victims of group obedience (Tischler, 2004).

There was insignificant difference between boys and girls in the manner they adhered to leaders’ commands of seeking or not seeking academic counseling. Boys and girls obeyed their group leaders in equal measure because other group members did so in order to create harmony in their groups. These views are in line with a study on group obedience by Shanab and Yahya in 1978 who also found no difference in male and female obedience (Burger, Girgis & Manning, 2011). Boys’ and girls’ acts of obeying group leaders to avoid punishment brought out no difference in the impact of group obedience on academic counseling. These views are contradicted by Hofling who in the 1960s carried out a study on group obedience which found out females were more unwilling to question authority than males even when they had a reason to (Mc Leod, 2008).

General information about the influence of group leaders on members’ attitude towards academic counseling was sought from an open- ended question in the students’ questionnaire. The findings denoted that the leaders created desirable attitude towards academic counseling by encouraging members to seek academic counseling. Thus, group members sought academic counseling for academic improvement. Positive influence was also brought out from leaders by creating beliefs among group members that students required academic counseling for academic excellence. The findings revealed that group members tended to advise other members to seek academic counseling out of leaders’ favorable influence towards academic counseling. These results are supported by Wingfield (2003) who affirms that group obedience to authority frequently produces beneficial results, for it facilitates coordination among persons in groups or collective settings.



Group leaders however influenced members negatively against academic counseling by criticizing this service. The leaders convinced members that they could handle their academic challenges without consulting the teacher counselor since they attached no value to academic counseling. This implied that students were unlikely to improve academic performance. Group members were directly discouraged from seeking academic counseling by group leaders. These views are in line with Schaefer (2002) who maintains that in some cases, group obedience to authority can produce very negative consequences especially if the orders involve actions that are questionable or reprehensible.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Group obedience which is geared towards seeking academic counseling causes academic improvement among students whereas obedience directed towards not seeking academic counseling limits this improvement. Male students obey group leaders on seeking or not seeking academic counseling to a lower extent than their female counterparts. Therefore, females benefit more from academic counseling than males and are likely to improve academic performance more than boys. Boys and girls desire similar attention in academic counseling since there is no statistical difference in the impact of group obedience on academic counseling between the two genders.

There is need for school administrators to institute school policies that boost group leaders' perception of academic programs offered in the schools. This may be achieved through having an open day with all group leaders in a school. Teacher counselors may need to intensify academic counseling programs by organizing sessions for various groups among students on how group obedience impacts on academic counseling.

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