

## **An Offer to Expand the Scope of Guidance Activities in Schools: The Case of Obesity**

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**Abstract:** One of the growing problems of humanity is overweight and obesity. According to the data of the World Health Organization, the rate of obesity in the human population has increased 3 times since 1975. This issue should be taken seriously, and public health policies should be developed in this regard. In addition, at the point of struggling with this issue, this study recommends the guidance programs applied in schools. Guidance programs of schools have emerged according to the needs of modern people and have been shaped in the process. It may be possible to find a solution to obesity, which is one of the growing problems of humanity today, by raising awareness from school age. As it can be seen in the sample school discussed in this regard, although guidance activities are common, it has been revealed that obesity is not on the agenda in any way. This study offers a proposal for addressing obesity in guidance activities.

**Keywords:** Overweight, Obesity, Guidance Activities, Students

### **1. Introduction**

The social life of modern people is getting more complex day by day. That's why people need expert help on many issues more than ever before. One of the growing problems of modern man is overweight and obesity. Even if the solution of this problem is sometimes through clinical treatments, it can be said that it can be significantly prevented by public health policies. At this point, it is seen that the problem of obesity reaches down to primary school children. Guidance activities applied in schools can contribute significantly to the solution of obesity. However, this issue should be included in the program of guidance activities and educators should be educated on this subject.

### **2. Guidance**

Guidance is the activity of helping a person to improve or find a solution to a problem on an issue that they do not know in the best way possible. In the modern world, people's ways of overcoming their problems and developing solutions are very different. Most of the time, these paths to solutions go through

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very complex processes. If a person is looking for a solution to a problem, it is very difficult to follow any method if he does not have enough information about this subject (Gysbers, 1990).

Even more, it is sometimes impossible for them to find a solution. In addition, what is more important than knowing how complex processes work in different situations is to know how to respond to the needs of the individual and to produce solutions. It is not possible to say that producing solutions is fully achieved by knowing the processes. Likewise, knowing how these processes will respond to the needs of individuals is an important premise that makes guidance activities necessary (Tyler, 1958).

There are different definitions of guidance that support each other. These definitions have some common points. First of all, the most important feature that distinguishes guidance from educational activity is that it is aimed at the individual. While planning educational activities, a curriculum is drawn up based on the average human profile and this curriculum is applied to everyone in the same way. However, the focus in guidance activities is the individual. The main purpose of the guidance is to solve the problems of individuals that arise outside of their education processes and to develop personalized solutions (Myrick, 1987).

The main purpose of the guidance activity is to help the individual to recognize his/her own weaknesses and strengths and to make decisions accordingly. In addition, it offers alternatives that will help make the right decisions by taking into account the environmental effects that the individual cannot realize due to the complex nature of the decision-making processes. In all these aspects, guidance is actually a professional help process for the individual (Klein, 1997).

Guidance is the help for the individual in choosing among the alternatives and adapting to the environment he is in. From another point of view, guidance is the support given by experts to enable people to develop their capacities and abilities in a suitable environment in accordance with environmental conditions (Savickas, 2008).

One of the key terms that come to the fore in the definition of guidance is that this activity is a process. Thus, guidance is not a one-time help or advice given to a person. It is the long-term support given to the individual in order to eliminate the deficiencies of the individual, to evaluate his strengths better and to realize himself in accordance with the environmental conditions (Kolodinsky et al., 2007).

Additionally, guidance consists of psychological help given to the individual. Therefore, there is no activity aimed at improving the educational status of the student in the guidance activity. Since people's psychological aspects are highly influential on their decision-making mechanisms, they run the risk of making wrong decisions and misdirecting their future. In order to minimize these risks and to make decisions in a healthier mood, the individual needs external support. Meeting this need is possible with guidance activities. In terms of these aspects, it is important that the guidance activities are carried out by experts and that personalized solutions are produced (Savickas, 2008).

Guidance activities have to produce solutions for each student according to their personal situation. However, from another aspect of the issue, these activities should involve all students. It can be done individually, according to the needs of the students, or it can be done in groups. It is important for sustainability that the guidance activities implemented under some general headings are planned and

systematic. Guidance activities should also be planned and implemented in a way that will provide continuity like educational activities within the school (Otaegui et al., 2013).

Guidance activities gain more and more different dimensions every day and become a part of educational life. These activities, which were organized to meet the needs of modern people, have been expanded to include parents other than students. These activities can be considered in two ways. First of all, activities for the needs of the parents will be carried out, and solutions can be produced in coordination with the parents to meet the needs of the students (Kim & Lyons, 2003).

## **2.1 Guidance and Education**

In order to evaluate the relationship between guidance and education, we should firstly check the definition of education. Education is a process of transferring information to individuals in order to provide desirable changes in their attitudes. As can be seen from this definition, education is not only transferring the content of the courses to the students. As a matter of fact, there were these modern times when education was handled as just transferring the content of the courses, but the contemporary needs of the society and the individuals inside it made it necessary to expand the scope of education (Brighouse, 2006). In this context, the understanding of constructivist education models was developed, and the content of guidance was also incorporated into the modern curriculum in educational settings. For instance, games that accelerate the mental and psychological growth of children must be incorporated into the educational process (Çelik et al., 2022). There are some differences between guidance and education, but we should highlight the point that they serve for the same purpose. Both education and guidance aim at realizing the potential of the individuals in a desired way and making them part of social life so as to be contributing to the society in the limits of how they realized themselves (Potts, 2011). The main difference between education and guidance is at the point of methods and processes. The differences can be put forth as follows:

1. Education helps to improve cognitive skills while guidance helps to improve affective side.
2. Education is given to all students while guidance is aimed at individuals.
3. Education is a compulsory process for students in the modern world while guidance is a voluntary activity.
4. There are measurement and evaluation processes in education while any activity is not measured in guidance (Wall, 1963).

It should be noted down that although there are differences, it is inevitable to separate these different kinds of activities in the modern education settings. Guidance plays important roles to complete many shortcomings of the education. It is sometimes impossible for education processes to handle some issues related to students. At this point, guidance plays roles to come up with solutions.

## **2.2 Types of Guidance**

Guidance activities are gradually extending the scope so as to meet the emerging needs of students in the modern world. Contemporary life brings along more problems and more complex lifestyle which is almost impossible for any student to lead by calculating the future opportunities and threats. Even more, the students may not know effectively how to choose future career for themselves. Although the scope of these

activities are expanding, there are certain common types of guidance to be mentioned (Zacharia et al., 2015).

### **2.2.1 Educational Guidance**

Every individual has their own capabilities and weak points, and they should be directed according to their abilities to a certain field in their studies. Teachers are expected to work with children in their professional life, so they observe, evaluate, and provide them necessary guidance in different situations (Celik et al., 2022). It may be very difficult for a child at young age to evaluate their strong sides and decide anything for their future. For this reason, they need assistance and support at this point. To execute identical activities and learn new knowledge and abilities, students want concrete examples (Yildiz & Celik, 2020). Teachers demonstrate precisely how to execute tasks and inspire students to confidently execute comparable tasks. It is an important duty for the guidance unit to evaluate a student's personal situation and the environmental effects and determine the best option possible for them. Moreover, guidance can also help the students to adapt to the new choice and to improve effectively. In this respect, the educational guidance solves the problems or guides the students about their education and related future issues. At this point, there could be some problematic points that should be highlighted to better cope with (Jan & Mattoo, 2018).

In many countries the educational systems allow the students to choose their future career and continue their education accordingly. It is significant for the guidance unit to help them to choose the right future education type and profession (Supriyanto et al., 2019).

It is also important for the students to take some elective courses that directly correspond to their education and future career. The guidance should also provide the students with necessary recommendation to benefit from these courses at the most effective level (Pascual, 2014). Students also need psychological support to achieve the courses they take. The duty of the guidance unit has already been defined as psychological support for the students. Students also need to gain some habits to study for their lessons. It is in the scope of the guidance unit to provide necessary support for the students. Students may also come across some difficulties in their lessons. The guidance unit should also help them to overcome such unexpected difficulties (Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013).

There may be some gifted students who should get different education. If guidance units detect such students and give them support for better development, it will be very useful for these children. Otherwise, their potential may be totally useless in time (Trail, 2021). In parallel with this, it is also in the scope of the duty of the guidance unit to detect the students with specific learning disabilities and direct them for suitable education (Meteyard & Gilmore, 2015).

### **2.2.2 Vocational Guidance**

Choosing a career and adjusting your education to your plans are milestones in human life, so people make very crucial decisions at this turn of their life. For this reason, they need guidance more than ever at these turning points in their life. The support that the student receives from the guidance unit at the point of career choice is called vocational guidance (Gysbers, 2008). During this guidance activity, some points need to be carefully evaluated.

1. Vocational guidance activities usually come to the forefront as activities for students in the last year of high school. However, longer follow-up is required for this to be more effective.
2. The main purpose of the guidance activities is not to make a choice on behalf of the student, but to help him in the choice we will make. Therefore, it is one of the main tasks of the guidance to help the students in the selection that they will make accordingly.
3. At this point, it is important to take guidance activities to the parents of the students in the same way. Exchanging ideas with the student's parents will cause the student to follow a healthier path in choosing a profession.
4. In addition to the abilities and expectations of the student, there are other situations that the guidance service should pay attention to. In choosing a profession, the conditions of the country and the risk factors related to the future of the profession should be correctly evaluated and given to the student. In this respect, the guidance activity is a professional support.
5. It is very important at the point of guidance not to put any pressure on students about choosing a profession (Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013).

### **2.2.3 Personal Guidance**

Leading a person to live as a normal member of the society and gaining them some value judgments are within the scope of personal guidance. In order for people to live in harmony with others, they need to go through a certain psychological development. In addition to the activities that will help this development, the regulation of the social relations of the individual with others is another important issue. In addition, activities to solve the problems that arise in people's social life can be evaluated within this scope (Multon & Lapan, 1995). At this point, students' personal and psychological problems can be shown under certain headings:

1. bodily problems and health problems (Celik et al., 2022)
2. problems in relationships with others and inability to use leisure time appropriately
3. unwarranted fears and anxieties and phobias
4. self-confidence problems and overexcitement in front of others
5. Problems with their sex and falling in love with someone else
6. Financial situation problems
7. Moral adjustment problems (Tan, 2001; Tosun & Yildiz, 2015)

### **2.3 Obesity**

Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that poses a risk to health. The generally accepted measure of obesity is body mass index (BMI), a person's weight (in kilograms) divided by the square of their height (in meters). A person with a BMI of 30 or more is generally considered obese. A person with a BMI of 25 or more is considered overweight (Dauphinot et al., 2009).

In other words, it is a metabolic disorder that occurs as a result of the accumulation of fat tissue in the body as a result of the accumulation of energy taken through food and its storage as a result of being more than the energy expended, and the excessive increase in fat mass in the body compared to other mass.

The Body Mass Index, which is used by the World Health Organization to determine obesity, is widely used in this regard. Body mass index is the value obtained by dividing a person's body weight in kilograms by the square of their height in meters. Although the body mass index is a method used to estimate body weight in pre-determined categories, it does not give precise information about the fat ratio in the body (World Health Organization, 2022a).

Table 1: Body mass index values

BMI	Nutritional status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5–24.9	Normal weight
25.0–29.9	Pre-obesity
30.0–34.9	Obesity class I
35.0–39.9	Obesity class II
Above 40	Obesity class III

(World Health Organization, 2022b)

## 2.4 Obesity Prevalence in the World

The obesity rate has tripled worldwide since 1975. According to 2016 data, nearly 2 billion adults over the age of 18 fall into the overweight class. Out of these two billion people, 650 million are defined as obese. Again, according to 2016 data, 39% of adults over the age of 18 are in the overweight category, and 13% are in the obese category. All over the world, the number of people who die from obesity is more than people who die from underweight. According to 2020 data, 39 million children under the age of 5 are considered overweight or obese. In addition, 340 million children and young people aged 5-19 years are classified as overweight or obese (World Health Organization, 2022a).

## 2.5 Obesity Prevalence in Iraq

According to the research conducted in 2015, 31.8% of the Iraqi population falls into the overweight category. Likewise, 33.9% of this population is in the obese category (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2021). Another study conducted in the city of Erbil in the Iraqi Kurdistan region yielded important results. This research on primary school children included children aged 6-13. In total, 26% of the children were obese. In addition, according to these data, the age group with the highest prevalence of obesity is children aged 12-13 with 31.66% (Sulaiman & AlAni, 2020).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Model

This study is qualitative, and data were collected by consulting teachers' opinions. The teachers were asked what they do in their guidance activities and how often they do these activities. Afterwards, it was discussed how much the problem of overweight and obesity entered the agenda of teachers in the activities. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, the obesity rate was not calculated by measuring on children. Instead,

classroom teachers were asked about the class size and how many overweight or obese students were in the class. The teachers gave numbers by looking at the class list.

### **3.2 Sampling**

In this study, teachers working at Stirling School in the city of Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan region, were used. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 3 of the teachers under the titles we determined. In this interview, the data we obtained from the teachers were used. In addition, 10 teachers were asked about their class sizes and how many overweight or obese students were in their classes. The classes that we studied here were from 3rd to 6th classes in a primary school.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data collection in this study was through semi-structured interviews with teachers. In addition, the numbers given by the teachers were taken into account in determining the obesity rate.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Frequency of Guidance Activities**

The teachers were asked how many days in a week they do guidance activities. The teachers conduct counseling activities with their students after school 2 days a week.

### **4.2 Content of Guidance Activities**

What the teachers said about the content of guidance activities in our interview is given below.

Teacher 1: “Our guidance activities are carried out according to a certain plan. We have activities with some of our students one day of the week and with the others the other day. Since they are for primary school students, there are some educational games in these activities. We also drink tea and eat some snacks with our students. The subjects of our guidance activities are generally about general morality, communication rules and relations with friends. We sometimes watch short films about the subject in these activities. We also tell different stories and tales when conveying some subjects to the students. Sometimes we ask our students to make presentations on the subject.”

Teacher 2: “In the guidance meetings we have with our students, general morality issues, family relations, relations with teachers and friends at school are discussed. In addition, general topics such as the efficient use of free time, being thrifty and helping each other are included in our guidance curriculum. Due to the special circumstances of some of our students, we also carry out guidance activities with them. In addition, we visit the parents of the students and organize some of our programs at their homes. We are in constant contact with the parents about the situation of the students. We cooperate with parents to solve some problems of children. In addition, we organize activities for our students with poor course status. Sometimes we have activities such as lecturing to students, and sometimes we have activities to motivate them. We also offer courses to develop some of our children's abilities such as music and painting. We try to solve some of the problems that arise in the relations of our students with each other, through guidance.”

Teacher 3: “I can say that the guidance activities are the distinguishing aspect of our school. These activities are very important to us. With these activities, we do not only aim to bring some good behaviors to students. In addition, the improvement of students' course status depends on the effective implementation of these activities. That's why we try to do guidance activities with our students without interruption. Here we can see many issues that we do not have the opportunity to see in the classroom environment. In addition, our students become more distant and sincere from the formality of the classroom environment. This brings us closer to the student. Thus, our students can express their problems more clearly. These activities are very important for the emotional development of students.”

As we see from what the teachers expressed in the interview, the teachers work to achieve the expected results from the guidance activity. These activities, which are designed for the needs of students, are mostly based on behavioral and psychological development, since children are at primary school age. They also deal with the problematic aspects of students. In addition, it was observed that the teachers were in close contact with the parents. They work in coordination with the parents about the situation of the students. It is seen that many things expected from guidance activities in the universal sense are done here. Although there are other aspects of the guidance activities, it was seen that those aspects were not evaluated because they did not address the ages of the children.

### **4.3 The Place of Obesity in Guidance Activities**

In our interviews with the teachers, we asked each of them about the overweight and obese students in their classes. First of all, we need to state that teachers are aware of this problem. However, they stated that they did not take any action to address this problem. Only 2 teachers stated that they talked to the parents of the students about this problem and that the parents would deal with this situation of their children. When we asked whether overweight children had problems in their classroom, some of them said that it was a problem for some students. They even stated that some children sometimes made fun of them. However, they stated that this issue was not properly addressed in both the guidance activities and any program of the school. Although this issue came to the fore in the discussions among the teachers, it was stated by the teachers that no steps were taken in the guidance activities.

### **4.4 Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity**

In this study, we asked the classroom teachers how many students were in their classrooms and how many of them were obese. Based on the feedback we received from a total of 10 teachers, 38 (17%) of the 224 students in their classes could be considered overweight or obese. According to the data we obtained in the literature review above, 26% of the students were defined as overweight or obese. Here, however, we see that the rate we found is slightly lower. In fact, this rate is high enough to raise this problem.

## **5. Discussion**

The understanding of education of masses that spread throughout the society entered the agenda of humanity in modern times and has shown significant developments afterwards. Each individual has been encountering with different problems (Yildiz & Budur, 2019). Thus, the periods when knowledge and education were in the hands of certain groups ended and a new history began for humanity. However, the problems of human beings have differentiated and increased with the changing times, and new solutions

have been required for them. Guidance activities played an important role when these needs arose. The emergence of many needs of people other than education has made guidance activities more and more popular with each other day. One of the important aspects of modern times is the complexity of the processes to meet human needs. It is impossible for people to know this complex situation and act accordingly. From the point of search for solutions to emerging problems, modern people need expert opinions and guidance.

Students have a special place in human life acting on this complex plane. It can be said that students need help and guidance more than anyone, especially because they are young and do not have a very good understanding of the complex order. Needs arise especially at the point of choosing a profession according to their abilities and operating the processes necessary for it. In addition to all these, they need the help of experts under the name of guidance in improving the psychological state of the students and giving them support.

As can be seen, as the complex structure of the modern world increases, the needs and expectations of people also increase. In this context, in the modern world, some problems arise that have not been brought to the agenda of students before. As can be seen from the data of the World Health Organization that is quoted above, the number of obese people in the whole humanity has increased 3 times compared to 1975. This is a new problem of humanity. It is seen that especially school-age children suffer from this problem from a younger age. Although studies on this issue have yielded different results, a significant portion of school-age students face the problem of overweight and obesity. In addition, students often do not know how to deal with these problems. At this point, students need expert help.

One of the important institutions where the needs of students are determined and tried to be met in accordance with the modern times is schools. What makes the schools different is that they emerged as a result of a professional structuring with the support of the state and that they were operated within the framework of this understanding. That's why schools seem to be the solution to many problems of modern people.

One of the issues that modern people need the most support today is overweight and obesity. It is obvious that especially school-age children do not develop any solution to this problem. The development of this solution can take place within the school, which is also a professional organization. It can be said that the most effective way of doing this is through guidance activities. When we look at the curricula of modern education systems, it is apparent that it is generally based on the development of the cognitive aspect of the students. In this respect, it is not possible to find a solution to obesity, which is one of the main problems of students, with in-class activities. There are also emotional aspects to this issue. When all these are brought together, it can be said that the best alternative to offer a solution to this problem is guidance activities.

It has been observed that the guidance activities have been expanded and designed according to the needs of the students since the day they emerged. Obesity, which is now one of the main problems of modern people, should be evaluated within the scope of these activities. Although there are medical aspects to this problem, it can be stated that guidance activities can play a very important role for any solution. Even medical support can be given to students through guidance activities. This issue can be made a part of the

guidance activities by considering its different aspects, stages and affecting factors. Thus, it may become easier to deal with this problem. This problem, which is already growing constantly, also needs to be brought to the agenda by policy makers somehow.

## 6. Conclusion

Overweight and obesity, which are the growing problems of humanity, have even become a necessity for clinical interventions. An important aspect of public health is the prevention of diseases with necessary precautions before they arrive. In this context, the fight against obesity should be done not only on obese people, but also on people who are at risk of having this disease, and even on the whole society. Organized institutions that will deal with this professionally in social life are primarily seen as schools. For this, guidance activities can be an important solution for both those who suffer from this current disease and those who are at this risk. In addition, this issue should be turned into public health policies by putting on the agenda in the necessary platforms.

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