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Evaluating the Implementation Levels of Guidance and Counselling Programme in Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Solwezi District, Zambia

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Abstract

This study evaluated the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in selected secondary schools in Solwezi District. The objectives were to assess the availability of guidance and counselling services and teachers, identify challenges affecting programme implementation, and suggest strategies for improving counselling services in schools. A descriptive survey design was employed, involving 120 respondents from four selected secondary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and analyzed using frequencies and percentages for quantitative data as well as themes for qualitative data. The findings showed that guidance and counselling programmes were available in most schools, although implementation remained moderate. The study revealed that the major challenge was the shortage of trained and specialised counsellors, which negatively affected effective service delivery. Other challenges included inadequate counselling materials and facilities, heavy teacher workload, limited funding and administrative support, and negative learner attitudes towards counselling due to fear of stigma. Despite these difficulties, respondents indicated that guidance and counselling programmes contributed positively to improving learner discipline and decision-making skills. The study further established variations among schools in the availability of guidance and counselling teachers, with some schools having more personnel than others. To improve programme implementation, respondents recommended training and recruiting specialised guidance and counselling teachers, providing adequate counselling materials and private offices, reducing teacher workload, increasing funding and administrative support, and sensitising learners on the importance of counselling services. The study concluded that although guidance and counselling programmes existed in secondary schools in Solwezi District, their effectiveness was limited by inadequate personnel, insufficient resources, and weak institutional support. The study recommended strengthening counselling services through increased training, resource provision, funding, and learner awareness programmes.

Keywords: Counselling Programme Implementation; Educational Institutions; Guidance and Counselling; Learner Support Services and Speech and School Counselling Services

1. Introduction

Guidance and counselling programmes have become an essential component of modern education systems because they support learners' academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and career development. At secondary school level, learners face numerous challenges such as academic pressure, peer influence, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, emotional stress, behavioural problems, and career uncertainty (Kashumba et al., 2025). Adolescence is a critical stage marked by identity formation and heightened emotional sensitivity, making structured support systems necessary to help learners make informed decisions and cope effectively with life situations. According to Gysbers and Henderson

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(2026), comprehensive school counselling programmes are designed to address learners' developmental needs through academic guidance, personal counselling, and career development support.

In many developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, guidance and counselling services are well established and integrated into school systems through trained professional counsellors who provide structured interventions. Lunenburg (2025) explains that effective counselling programmes contribute to improved academic performance, positive behaviour, and better decision-making among learners. These programmes are often supported by strong policies, adequate funding, and specialised training institutions, although challenges such as high counsellor-to-learner ratios and increasing mental health concerns still persist.

In developing countries, including those in Africa, guidance and counselling programmes have been introduced in schools but continue to face implementation challenges. Mapfumo (2025) found that schools in Zimbabwe experienced shortages of trained counsellors, inadequate facilities, and insufficient counselling resources. Similarly, Mutie & Ndambuki (2026) observed in Kenya that heavy teacher workloads and lack of professional counselling training reduced the effectiveness of school counselling services. Adam-Yawson et al. (2021) further noted that while counselling programmes positively influenced learner behaviour and academic performance, their effectiveness was affected by inadequate counselling materials, shortage of trained counsellors, and learner stigma toward counselling services. Ibrahim et al. (2024) also emphasized that poor funding and weak administrative support contributed to ineffective implementation of counselling programmes in many schools.

In South Africa, guidance and counselling services are integrated into learner support programmes, particularly through life orientation subjects and psychosocial support systems. Prinsloo (2026) states that these services play an important role in addressing issues such as violence, drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS. However, rural and under-resourced schools still face shortages of trained counsellors and inadequate counselling facilities, demonstrating inequalities in resource distribution within education systems.

In Zambia, guidance and counselling programmes were introduced to support learners' holistic development and improve discipline, academic performance, and learner welfare. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2026) emphasizes the importance of implementing effective counselling services in schools. However, implementation remains inconsistent in many secondary schools. Kabamba, Mundende, and Simui (2020) found that many schools lack trained counsellors, adequate counselling facilities, and sufficient funding, resulting in counselling responsibilities being assigned to untrained teachers. Mweemba (2016) further observed that learners faced barriers such as lack of confidentiality, inadequate counselling spaces, and fear of stigma, which discouraged them from seeking counselling support. Mwanza (2021) also noted that although counselling services positively contributed to learner discipline and academic performance, their effectiveness was limited by poor implementation and inadequate resources.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Guidance and counselling programmes were recognised as important in helping secondary school learners address academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and career-related challenges (Gibson & Mitchell, 2007). However, despite their importance, many secondary schools experienced difficulties in effectively implementing these programmes due to shortages of trained counsellors, inadequate counselling facilities and materials, insufficient funding, heavy teacher workloads, weak administrative support, and learner stigma toward counselling services (Idowu, 2004). In Zambia, counselling services were often handled by untrained teachers, and most previous studies focused mainly on the general importance of counselling rather than evaluating actual implementation levels, particularly in districts such as Solwezi (Makinde, 1984; UNESCO, 2002). Secondary school learners in Solwezi District continued to face academic, emotional, and social challenges associated with rapid urbanisation and mining activities, yet it was not clearly known whether guidance and counselling programmes were being effectively implemented in schools (MoE, 2016). Therefore, this study sought to evaluate the implementation levels of guidance and counselling programmes in selected secondary schools in Solwezi District by examining the availability of counsellors, identifying challenges affecting implementation, and exploring strategies for improving counselling services.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the level of implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in selected secondary schools in Solwezi District, Zambia.
- To identify the challenges affecting the effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in selected secondary schools in Solwezi District, Zambia.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be significant to several stakeholders in the education sector. The study may help the Ministry of Education develop and strengthen policies related to the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools. School administrators may benefit from the study by gaining insights into the challenges affecting counselling services and possible strategies for improving learner support systems in schools. Guidance and counselling teachers may also use the findings to improve the delivery of counselling services and promote learners' academic, social, emotional, and behavioural well-being. In addition, the study may benefit learners by contributing to the improvement of counselling programmes that support academic performance, career guidance, discipline, and emotional development. Researchers and scholars may further use the findings as reference material for future studies related to guidance and counselling programmes and learner support services in secondary schools, particularly within the Zambian education context.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Person-Centred Theory developed by Carl Rogers. The theory emphasizes the importance of providing a supportive, empathetic, and non-judgmental environment in helping individuals understand themselves and solve their personal challenges effectively. According to Rogers, individuals have the capacity for self-growth, self-awareness, and positive behavioural change when they are provided with appropriate emotional support and guidance. In the context of secondary schools, the theory explains the importance of guidance and counselling programmes in helping learners cope with academic pressure, emotional stress, peer influence, behavioural challenges, and career uncertainty. The theory further highlights the role of trained counsellors in creating trusting relationships with learners through empathy, confidentiality, acceptance, and active listening. Corey (2021) states that the Person-Centred Theory promotes self-understanding and personal growth by creating an environment that encourages openness and trust between the counsellor and the client. Similarly, McLeod (2022) explains that effective counselling relationships based on empathy and unconditional positive regard positively influence learners' emotional well-being and decision-making abilities. This study adopted the Person-Centred Theory because it provided a suitable framework for understanding how effective guidance and counselling services can support learners' holistic development and improve their academic, social, and emotional well-being. The theory also helped explain how factors such as shortage of trained counsellors, lack of confidentiality, inadequate counselling facilities, and negative learner attitudes could affect the effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate the implementation levels of Guidance and Counselling programmes in selected secondary schools in Solwezi District, Zambia. The mixed-methods approach was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect detailed information on the availability, effectiveness, challenges, and implementation practices of guidance and counselling services in schools. Descriptive survey designs are widely used in studies related to guidance and counselling because they help describe existing conditions and perceptions among participants. The target population comprised head teachers, guidance and counselling teachers, regular teachers, and pupils from selected secondary schools in Solwezi District. A sample of 1500 was selected using both purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Head teachers and guidance teachers were purposively selected because of their direct involvement in the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes, while teachers and pupils were randomly selected to ensure equal representation and reduce bias. The sample included 4 head teachers, 1 from each selected school. 4 guidance & counselling teachers, 2 from each selected school. 20 regular teachers, 5 from each selected school and 1468 pupils, 367 from each selected school. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, tables, and charts, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify major themes and patterns emerging from participants' responses. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and permission from relevant education authorities.

3. Findings and discussions

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Assessing the Level of Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Programmes in Secondary Schools

Table 1 Level of Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Programmes in Secondary Schools

Theme	Response Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Availability of programmes	Available	120	80%
	Not available	30	20%
Staffing	Trained counsellors available	95	63%
	Not adequately trained	55	37%
Frequency of counselling sessions	Regular sessions	70	47%
	Irregular sessions	80	53%
Types of services offered	Comprehensive services offered	85	57%
	Limited services offered	65	43%
Accessibility of services	Easily accessible	90	60%
	Not easily accessible	60	40%
Learner participation	High participation	75	50%
	Low participation	75	50%
Facilities and resources	Adequate facilities	65	43%
	Inadequate facilities	85	57%
Administrative support	Strong support	100	67%
	Weak support	50	33%
Timetable integration	Integrated into timetable	60	40%
	Not integrated	90	60%
Awareness levels	High awareness	80	53%
	Low awareness	70	47%
Effectiveness	Effective implementation	85	57%
	Ineffective implementation	65	43%
Institutional variation	High implementation level	78	52%
	Low implementation level	72	48%

The study established that guidance and counselling programmes were available in most of the selected secondary schools in Solwezi District, although the level of implementation varied from one school to another. The findings revealed that schools had introduced counselling services aimed at addressing learners' academic, social, emotional, and career-related challenges (Lunenburg, 2010). These programmes were implemented through activities such as career guidance sessions, peer counselling, motivational talks, individual counselling, and guidance during assemblies. The availability of such programmes demonstrated that schools recognised the importance of supporting learners beyond classroom instruction. However, the study also found that in some schools, guidance and counselling activities were not conducted consistently due to limited resources, inadequate planning, and competing academic demands. Despite these challenges, the existence of guidance and counselling programmes contributed positively to learner discipline, emotional support, and academic guidance, thereby enhancing the overall school environment (Mapfumo &

Nkoma, 2013). The findings suggested that the implementation of these programmes played an important role in promoting learner welfare and helping students cope with various personal and educational challenges.

The study further found that some of the selected secondary schools had trained guidance and counselling teachers or counsellors responsible for coordinating counselling activities and supporting learners with personal, social, and academic issues. The presence of trained personnel enhanced the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services because trained counsellors possessed the knowledge and skills needed to handle sensitive learner concerns professionally and confidentially (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). These teachers were involved in providing career guidance, behavioural counselling, psychosocial support, and referrals for serious cases requiring specialised intervention. The study revealed that learners were more willing to seek help in schools where trained counsellors were available because they trusted the counsellors' ability to provide meaningful assistance. However, the findings also showed that some schools lacked adequately trained counsellors, resulting in ordinary teachers handling counselling responsibilities without specialised training. This limited the quality and effectiveness of counselling services in certain schools (Sink, 2011). The study therefore concluded that the availability of trained guidance and counselling teachers was a key factor influencing the successful implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Solwezi District.

The study further established that the frequency of counselling sessions conducted in the selected secondary schools in Solwezi District varied significantly from one school to another. In some schools, counselling sessions were conducted regularly on a weekly or fortnightly basis, often integrated into the school timetable or delivered during designated guidance periods (Gibson & Mitchell, 2015). One of the guidance and counselling teachers noted that:

“These regular sessions allowed counsellors to consistently engage with learners, monitor their progress, and address emerging academic, social, and emotional challenges in a timely manner”.

However, in other schools, counselling sessions were conducted irregularly or only when problems arose, mainly due to time constraints, lack of structured timetables for counselling, and limited availability of trained personnel. As a result, counselling services in such schools tended to be reactive rather than preventive. The study therefore indicated that where counselling sessions were frequent and well-structured, learners demonstrated better behaviour, improved academic focus, and increased willingness to seek support, whereas infrequent counselling limited the overall effectiveness of the programme (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

The study also revealed that a variety of counselling services were being offered in the selected secondary schools, reflecting the diverse needs of learners. These included academic counselling, where learners were guided on study skills, subject choices, and academic performance improvement strategies (McLeod, 2019). Career counselling was also prominent, helping students make informed decisions about future careers, subject combinations, and tertiary education pathways. In addition, schools provided social counselling aimed at improving interpersonal relationships, peer interaction, and adjustment to school life. Emotional counselling was offered to support learners dealing with stress, anxiety, family problems, and personal challenges. Behavioural counselling focused on addressing issues such as indiscipline, absenteeism, and poor conduct, while peer counselling programmes enabled trained learners to support their fellow students under supervision. The study findings indicated that schools that offered a wider range of counselling services were better positioned to address holistic learner needs and promote overall student development and wellbeing.

The study further established that the availability of counselling facilities such as offices, resource materials, and private spaces for counselling sessions was generally limited in most of the selected secondary schools in Solwezi District (Zunker, 2016). In some schools, guidance and counselling services were conducted in shared offices, staffrooms, or classrooms, which compromised confidentiality and discouraged learners from freely expressing their personal and emotional concerns. One of the head teachers stated that:

“The lack of dedicated counselling offices affected the quality of counselling interactions, as learners were often uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues in environments where privacy was not guaranteed”.

Additionally, the study found that counselling resource materials such as career guides, counselling manuals, psychological assessment tools, and information booklets were either insufficient or outdated in many schools. This limited counsellors' ability to provide accurate and comprehensive support to learners. However, a few better-resourced schools had designated counselling rooms equipped with basic furniture and relevant materials, which enhanced service delivery and encouraged more learners to seek help. The findings therefore suggested that inadequate

counselling facilities significantly hindered the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in schools (UNESCO, 2017; Chanda et al., 2025).

The study also revealed that administrative support towards guidance and counselling activities varied across the selected schools. In schools where administrators such as head teachers and deputy head teachers actively supported counselling programmes, there was improved coordination, allocation of time for counselling sessions, and provision of basic resources (Wango & Mungai, 2007). Such support included integrating guidance and counselling into the school timetable, encouraging teacher involvement, and facilitating training opportunities for counsellors. This administrative backing enhances the visibility and effectiveness of counselling services, making it easier for learners to access support (Kashumba et al., 2025b). However, in some schools, the study found that guidance and counselling programmes received minimal administrative attention, resulting in inadequate budgeting, lack of prioritisation, and limited monitoring of counselling activities. In such cases, counselling programmes were often overshadowed by academic performance pressures. The study therefore concluded that strong administrative support was a critical factor influencing the successful implementation and sustainability of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools (GRZ, 2016).

The study further established that the integration of guidance and counselling programmes into the school timetable was inconsistent across the selected secondary schools in Solwezi District. In some schools, counselling sessions were formally scheduled within the school timetable, allowing learners to access counselling services during designated periods without disrupting academic lessons (ASCA, 2019). This structured integration enhanced participation and ensured that counselling was treated as an essential component of the education system rather than an optional activity. One of the head teachers noted that:

“In such schools, teachers were able to plan and deliver counselling sessions systematically, which improved continuity and effectiveness”.

However, in other schools, counselling activities were not formally timetabled and were instead conducted irregularly during breaks, after classes, or when urgent cases arose. This lack of structured scheduling limited learner participation and reduced the effectiveness of preventive counselling interventions (Chanda et al., 2025b). The findings therefore indicated that proper integration of counselling programmes into the school timetable played a significant role in strengthening service delivery and improving learner access to guidance support (Sink, 2011).

The study also revealed that awareness levels among pupils regarding the availability and importance of counselling services varied considerably across the selected schools. In some schools, learners demonstrated a high level of awareness, as they were informed about counselling services through orientation programmes, assemblies, classroom announcements, and posters displayed around the school. These learners were more likely to seek help for academic, social, emotional, and behavioural challenges because they understood the role and benefits of counselling services. However, in other schools, the study found that many learners had limited awareness of counselling services or did not fully understand their purpose. As a result, such learners rarely accessed counselling support, even when they faced significant challenges. This lack of awareness was attributed to inadequate sensitization programmes, poor communication strategies, and minimal visibility of counselling services within the school environment (Chanda et al., 2025c; Baker & Gerler, 2008).

The study further established that the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in addressing learner challenges in the selected secondary schools in Solwezi District was moderate, with variation depending on the level of implementation in each school. In schools where counselling services were well-structured, regularly conducted, and supported by trained personnel, the programmes were found to be effective in addressing a wide range of learner challenges, including poor academic performance, indiscipline, absenteeism, peer pressure, and emotional distress (Gladding, 2018). Learners in such schools reported improved behaviour, better decision-making skills, and increased academic motivation as a result of counselling interventions.

The availability of structured counselling sessions and supportive school environments enhanced early identification and intervention of learner problems. However, in schools where counselling services were poorly implemented or irregular, their effectiveness was limited, and many learner challenges remained unresolved or escalated. This was mainly due to inadequate staffing, lack of resources, and insufficient administrative support, which reduced the overall impact of counselling programmes (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

The study also revealed significant differences in the level of implementation of guidance and counselling programmes among the selected secondary schools. Some schools demonstrated a high level of implementation, characterised by the

presence of trained counsellors, regular counselling sessions, integration into the school timetable, adequate administrative support, and availability of counselling facilities (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). In contrast, other schools exhibited a low level of implementation, where counselling services were informal, poorly coordinated, and lacked essential resources. These disparities resulted in unequal access to quality counselling services among learners within the district. Schools with higher implementation levels were more successful in promoting learner wellbeing and academic success compared to those with limited implementation. The findings therefore indicated that differences in leadership commitment, resource availability, and staff training significantly influenced how effectively counselling programmes were implemented across schools.

The study further established that the accessibility of guidance and counselling services to learners in the selected secondary schools in Solwezi District was uneven and largely dependent on the organisational structure and available resources within each school. In some schools, counselling services were easily accessible, with learners able to approach counsellors freely during designated counselling periods or through booked appointments. The presence of counselling offices, visible communication channels, and supportive teachers enhanced accessibility and encouraged learners to seek help without fear or stigma (Mapfumo & Nkoma, 2013). In such schools, counselling services were integrated into the school environment, making it easier for learners to receive timely support for academic, social, emotional, and behavioural challenges. However, in other schools, access to counselling services was limited due to the absence of dedicated counselling spaces, lack of clear communication about counselling procedures, and limited availability of trained counsellors. As a result, some learners are either unaware of where to seek help or hesitant to do so due to confidentiality concerns (Chanda, 2025). The findings therefore indicated that improved accessibility of counselling services was crucial for enhancing learner support and wellbeing (Wango & Mungai, 2007).

The study also revealed that the level of learner participation in guidance and counselling programmes varied significantly across the selected secondary schools. In schools where counselling services were well-promoted and easily accessible, learners showed higher levels of participation in counselling activities such as group counselling sessions, career guidance talks, peer counselling programmes, and individual consultations (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2014). These learners were more open to seeking support and engaging with counsellors on issues affecting their academic and personal lives. However, in other schools, learner participation was low due to factors such as lack of awareness, negative perceptions of counselling, fear of stigma, and inadequate sensitisation by school authorities. Some learners associated counselling with punishment or disciplinary action, which discouraged them from actively participating in counselling programmes. The study therefore concluded that learner participation was strongly influenced by awareness levels, school culture, and the accessibility of counselling services, and that improving these factors was essential for strengthening the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in schools (GRZ, 2016).

3.2. Challenges Affecting the Effective Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Programmes in Secondary Schools

A key finding of the challenges affecting effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Solwezi District was the shortage of trained guidance and counselling personnel. The study established that many schools lacked qualified counsellors, forcing ordinary teachers to handle counselling responsibilities alongside their teaching duties (Sink, 2011). This situation reduced the effectiveness of counselling services because most teachers had limited professional training in handling learners' psychological, emotional, academic, and career-related challenges. As a result, learners were not receiving adequate support in areas such as stress management, peer pressure, drug abuse prevention, career guidance, and personal development. One of the head teachers noted that:

"The shortage of trained personnel also contributed to irregular counselling sessions, lack of confidentiality, and poor follow-up on learners' cases".

Furthermore, the increasing number of learners in secondary schools made it difficult for the few available teachers to provide individualized counselling services (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). The findings suggested that inadequate human resource capacity negatively affected the successful implementation and quality of guidance and counselling programmes in schools.

The study further revealed that inadequate funding for counselling activities and materials was another major challenge affecting the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Solwezi District. Most schools operated with limited financial support, making it difficult to organize counselling workshops, career talks, sensitization programmes, and other learner support activities (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Schools also lacked essential counselling materials such as reference books, career guidance manuals, counselling offices, computers, and educational pamphlets needed to facilitate effective service delivery. In some cases, counselling programmes were given

low priority in school budgets compared to other academic and administrative activities. One of the guidance and counselling teachers explained that:

“The lack of sufficient funding reduced opportunities for teacher training and professional development in counselling practices”.

Additionally, poor financial support limited schools’ ability to invite professional counsellors and stakeholders to provide specialized guidance to learners. Consequently, the effectiveness and sustainability of guidance and counselling programmes were greatly weakened, thereby affecting learners’ academic performance, behaviour management, and emotional well-being (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2003).

Another important finding of the study was the lack of dedicated counselling rooms and facilities in most secondary schools in Solwezi District. The study revealed that many schools did not have private and well-equipped spaces where learners could comfortably receive counselling services. In most cases, counselling sessions were conducted in staffrooms, classrooms, or other open spaces that lacked privacy and confidentiality. This discouraged many learners from openly discussing sensitive personal, academic, or social problems due to fear of being overheard by other pupils or teachers (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2011). The absence of proper counselling facilities also affected the professionalism and effectiveness of guidance services because counsellors could not create a safe and supportive environment for learners. Additionally, schools lacked essential resources such as counselling reference materials, filing cabinets, computers, and internet access needed to support effective counselling programmes. The findings indicated that inadequate counselling infrastructure negatively affected learner participation and the overall implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in schools (Geldard & Geldard, 2008).

The study further found that heavy workload for teachers assigned counselling responsibilities negatively affected the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools. Most teacher-counsellors were required to balance counselling duties with full teaching loads, administrative responsibilities, and other co-curricular activities. As a result, many teachers failed to allocate adequate time for counselling sessions, follow-up activities, and individual learner support (Nyaga, 2013). One of the teachers alluded that:

“The heavy workload contributed to stress and reduced commitment among teacher-counsellors, thereby affecting the quality and consistency of counselling services offered to learners. In some schools, counselling activities were only conducted occasionally because teachers prioritized classroom teaching and examination preparation over counselling programmes”.

Furthermore, limited time for counselling reduced opportunities for identifying learners experiencing emotional, behavioural, or academic challenges at an early stage. The findings therefore suggested that excessive workload among teacher-counsellors hindered effective delivery of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools (Wango, 2006).

Another study finding was the existence of negative attitudes and misconceptions towards counselling among learners in secondary schools in Solwezi District. The study revealed that some learners perceived counselling services as being only meant for students with serious behavioural or disciplinary problems. This misconception discouraged many learners from voluntarily seeking counselling support even when facing academic, emotional, or social challenges (Corey, 2013). Some learners also feared being stigmatized by their peers if they were seen visiting counselling offices, while others lacked awareness about the importance and benefits of guidance and counselling programmes. As a result, counselling services in some schools recorded low learner participation and limited interaction between counsellors and students. The study further found that cultural beliefs and poor sensitization on counselling services contributed to learners’ negative perceptions. Consequently, many learners preferred discussing their problems with friends rather than seeking professional guidance from teacher-counsellors (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2011). The findings suggested that negative attitudes and misconceptions among learners reduced the effectiveness and utilization of counselling programmes in schools.

The study also established that limited time allocation for counselling programmes in schools negatively affected the implementation of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. Most schools concentrated heavily on academic activities and examination preparation, leaving very little time for counselling sessions and learner support programmes. In many cases, counselling activities were only conducted during free periods, assemblies, or after classes, which reduced learner participation and the effectiveness of the programmes (Wango, 2006). The shortage of allocated time also made it difficult for teacher-counsellors to conduct individual counselling sessions, group guidance activities, career talks, and follow-up programmes for learners experiencing difficulties. Additionally, learners often failed to

attend counselling sessions because of competing academic schedules and school responsibilities. The findings further indicated that inadequate time allocation limited opportunities for learners to openly discuss personal and academic challenges with counsellors. As a result, guidance and counselling programmes were not fully integrated into the school system, thereby weakening their impact on learner development and well-being (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Another significant finding of the study was the insufficient support from school administration and other stakeholders towards the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Solwezi District. The study revealed that some school administrators did not fully prioritize counselling services within the school system, resulting in inadequate allocation of resources, facilities, and time for counselling activities. In certain schools, guidance and counselling programmes lacked clear policies and administrative backing needed to ensure effective implementation and coordination (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). The study also found that limited involvement from parents, community members, educational authorities, and non-governmental organizations weakened the effectiveness of counselling programmes. Without strong stakeholder support, schools faced difficulties in organizing counselling workshops, career guidance activities, and learner sensitization programmes. Additionally, some administrators viewed counselling as a secondary activity compared to academic performance and examination preparation. Consequently, teacher-counsellors often operated without sufficient encouragement, supervision, or financial assistance from school leadership (Wango, 2006). The findings indicated that inadequate administrative and stakeholder support negatively affected the sustainability and effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in schools.

The study further established that confidentiality concerns significantly affected learner participation in guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools. Many learners feared that the personal information shared during counselling sessions would not remain private, especially in situations where counselling services were handled by teachers who also interacted with them in classrooms and other school activities (Corey, 2013). This fear discouraged learners from openly discussing sensitive issues such as family problems, relationships, substance abuse, emotional stress, and academic difficulties. In some schools, the absence of private counselling rooms and clear confidentiality procedures further increased learners' mistrust in counselling services. The study also revealed that some learners believed their problems could be disclosed to other teachers, parents, or fellow pupils, leading to embarrassment and stigmatization. As a result, many students avoided seeking counselling support even when facing serious personal challenges (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2011). The findings therefore suggested that confidentiality concerns greatly limited learner confidence, trust, and participation in guidance and counselling programmes.

Another important finding of the study was the existence of cultural and social barriers that discouraged the uptake of guidance and counselling services among learners in secondary schools in Solwezi District. The study revealed that some cultural beliefs and social norms negatively influenced learners' willingness to seek counselling support. In certain communities, discussing personal or family problems with counsellors was viewed as inappropriate because such matters were traditionally expected to remain within the family circle (Makinde, 1987). Additionally, some learners feared being judged by peers or labelled as weak when seeking counselling services, which contributed to low participation in counselling programmes. The study further found that gender stereotypes also affected counselling uptake, as some male learners believed that seeking emotional or psychological support was a sign of weakness. Religious beliefs and traditional practices in some communities also discouraged open discussions on sensitive issues such as relationships, mental health, and sexuality. Consequently, many learners preferred handling challenges privately rather than utilizing available counselling services in schools (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2004). The findings indicated that cultural and social barriers significantly limited the effectiveness and accessibility of guidance and counselling programmes among learners.

Another key finding of the study was that challenges related to learner discipline and behavioural issues negatively affected the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools in Solwezi District. The study revealed that many schools experienced increasing cases of indiscipline such as absenteeism, substance abuse, bullying, disrespect towards teachers, fighting, and poor academic attitudes among learners. These behavioural problems placed significant pressure on teacher-counsellors who were expected to address a large number of cases with limited resources and inadequate professional support (Myrick, 2011). The study further found that some learners were resistant to counselling interventions and often ignored guidance provided by teachers and counsellors. One of the pupils observed that:

"In certain situations, disciplinary approaches in schools focused more on punishment than corrective counselling, thereby limiting opportunities for behaviour change and emotional support. Additionally, peer influence and negative social environments contributed to the persistence of behavioural challenges among learners".

As a result, teacher-counsellors faced difficulties in effectively managing learner discipline while also promoting positive behavioural development (Gladding, 2012). The findings indicated that persistent behavioural and disciplinary challenges reduced the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in schools.

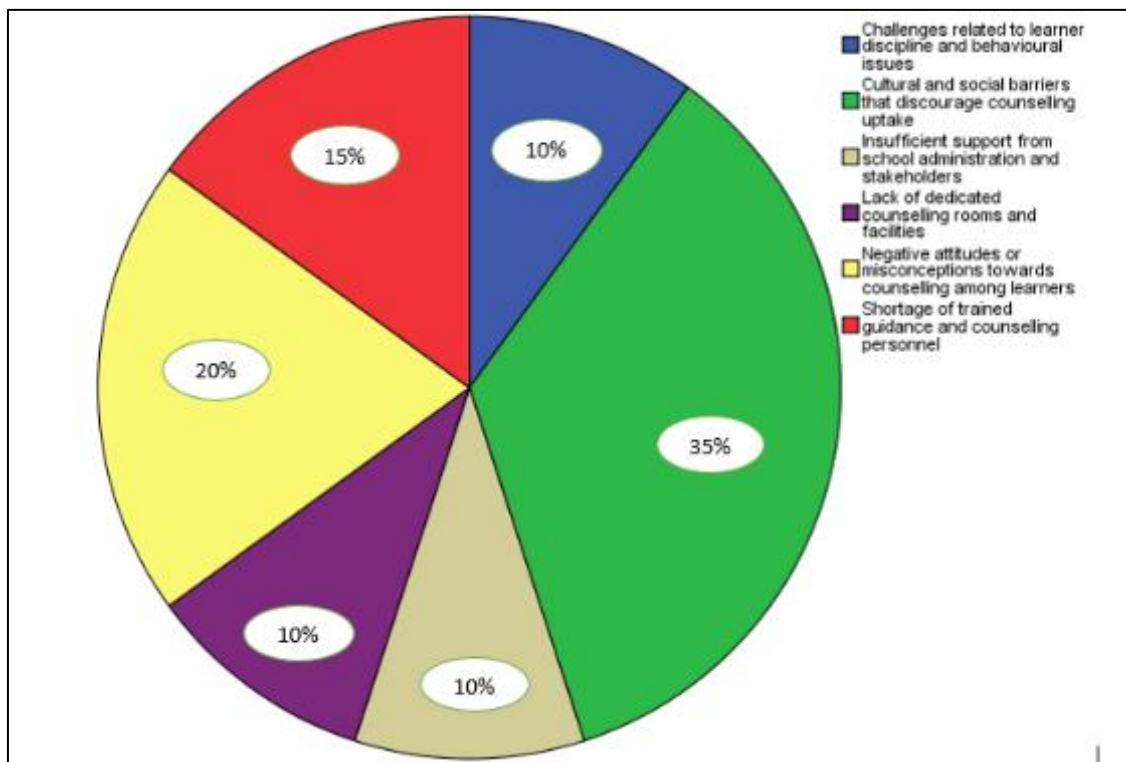


Figure 1 Level of Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Programmes in Secondary Schools

The study also established that limited awareness of the importance of guidance and counselling services among learners, parents, and some teachers negatively affected the implementation of counselling programmes in secondary schools. The findings revealed that many stakeholders lacked adequate understanding of the roles and benefits of guidance and counselling in supporting learners' academic achievement, career development, emotional well-being, and social adjustment (Gibson & Mitchell, 2008). As a result, counselling programmes were often undervalued and given less attention compared to other school activities. Some learners only associated counselling services with disciplinary cases and failed to recognize the broader support provided through counselling programmes. Similarly, some parents and teachers showed limited involvement in counselling activities due to insufficient knowledge about their significance in learner development. The study further revealed that inadequate sensitization and awareness campaigns within schools contributed to poor utilization of counselling services by learners. Consequently, many learners did not seek counselling assistance even when facing serious personal, social, or academic challenges (Shertzer & Stone, 1981). The findings therefore suggested that increasing awareness and sensitization on the importance of guidance and counselling services was necessary for improving learner participation and programme effectiveness in schools.

The study also established that inadequate parental involvement in learner counselling programmes negatively affected the implementation of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. The findings revealed that many parents had limited knowledge about the importance of school counselling programmes and rarely participated in counselling-related activities organized by schools. Some parents viewed counselling as solely the responsibility of teachers and schools, thereby reducing collaboration between parents and teacher-counsellors in supporting learners' emotional, social, and academic development (Hornby, 2011). The lack of parental involvement made it difficult for counsellors to effectively address learners' challenges because some issues required cooperation between the school and home environment. Additionally, poor communication between schools and parents reduced opportunities for monitoring learner behaviour, providing follow-up support, and reinforcing counselling guidance outside the school setting. In some cases, parents were unwilling to attend meetings or respond to counselling recommendations concerning their children. As a result, learners experiencing academic, behavioural, or emotional difficulties often failed to receive adequate support from both home and school environments (Christenson & Reschly, 2010). The findings therefore

suggested that insufficient parental involvement weakened the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in secondary schools.

Recommendations

- **Strengthening Policy Implementation and School Leadership Support:**

The Ministry of Education and school administrators should develop and enforce clear policies on the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes. School heads should actively supervise, monitor, and prioritise counselling services by ensuring they are fully integrated into school management plans.

- **Recruitment, Training, and Professional Development of Counsellors:**

The government and school management should ensure that guidance and counselling services are handled by trained and qualified personnel. Regular in-service training, workshops, and continuous professional development should be provided to equip teacher-counsellors with modern counselling skills and approaches.

- **Provision of Adequate Resources and Improved Working Conditions:**

Schools should be supported with adequate financial, physical, and material resources for counselling programmes. This includes providing private counselling offices, counselling materials, and reducing teacher workload to allow counsellors enough time to attend to learners. Adequate resourcing will improve confidentiality, accessibility, and effectiveness of counselling services, encouraging more learners to seek support.

4. Conclusion

This study evaluated the implementation levels of the guidance and counselling programme in selected secondary schools in Solwezi District, Zambia. The findings indicated that although guidance and counselling services exist in most schools, their level of implementation varies significantly. In some schools, the programme was fairly organised with allocated time, designated personnel, and basic counselling structures, while in others it remained largely informal and inconsistently delivered. The study further concluded that the effectiveness of the programme was constrained by several challenges, including inadequate trained counsellors, limited time allocation within the school timetable, insufficient administrative support, and lack of proper counselling facilities. These challenges reduced the accessibility and utilisation of counselling services among learners, thereby limiting the programme's intended impact on learners' academic, social, and emotional development. In addition, it was observed that learner awareness and participation in counselling services were generally low in schools where the programme was poorly implemented. Conversely, schools with stronger leadership support and better resourcing recorded higher levels of learner engagement and more positive outcomes. Overall, the study concluded that while the guidance and counselling programme is recognised as an important component of the education system, its implementation in Solwezi District secondary schools is not yet at an optimal level. Strengthening policy enforcement, improving resource allocation, and enhancing counsellor training are essential for improving the effectiveness of the programme and ensuring that learners receive adequate psychosocial and career support.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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