



Assessment of the Effectiveness of Counseling Approaches in Character Building among Secondary School Students: A Case of Public Secondary Schools in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania

Grace Manase Mwalukisa¹, Prosperity Mwasnsa Mwila^{2*}, Paul Rapheal Kitula³

¹Department of Education, Saint Augustine University of Tanzania

²School of Graduate Studies, Saint Augustine University of Tanzania

³ Department of Education Foundations, Saint Augustine University of Tanzania, Arusha Centre

Email : Bapropsk@gmail.com

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Abstract

Counseling services play a vital role in promoting students' holistic development by enhancing their moral, emotional, and social adjustment within the school environment. This study assessed the effectiveness of counseling approaches in character building among secondary school students in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania. Specifically, it examined how psychodynamic, humanistic, and client-centered counseling approaches influence students' behavior and personal growth. A mixed-method research design was used, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews among 528 participants, including teachers, students, school heads, and parents. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that counseling significantly contributes to students' discipline, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships; however, its impact is hindered by insufficient resources, limited professional training, and low administrative support. The study recommends that counseling services be strengthened through capacity building, dedicated facilities, and policy integration to promote sustainable character development among students.

Keywords: *Counseling approaches, character building, psychodynamic approach, humanistic counseling, client-centered counseling, secondary schools.*

INTRODUCTION

The provision of guidance and counseling in schools has become increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of educational development and moral formation worldwide. In Tanzania, this recognition aligns with government policy emphasizing the integration of counseling into educational institutions as a means of addressing behavioral, social, and academic challenges among students (URT, 2009). The rise in student indiscipline, absenteeism, substance use, and poor interpersonal relationships underscores the urgency of developing effective counseling interventions (Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010). Whereas traditional disciplinary measures such as corporal punishment have historically been used to enforce compliance, they fail to address the underlying psychological causes of misbehavior. Counseling, on the other hand, promotes understanding, self-reflection, and responsibility, thereby shaping both moral and emotional growth (Birichi & Rukunga, 2002).

Counseling as a process extends beyond correcting misbehavior; it fosters a supportive learning environment that nurtures emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making (Alutu & Aluede, 2006). In Kinondoni Municipality, diverse cultural influences and urban pressures create complex behavioral dynamics among adolescents, requiring multifaceted interventions. Students' exposure to social media, economic hardship, and peer pressure intensifies behavioral instability, often resulting in moral dilemmas that affect learning and social functioning. Teachers and school heads have thus become not only educators but also moral guides, mediators, and mentors (Nkuba & Kyaruzi, 2015). In this context, counseling provides structured mechanisms for developing positive character traits that align with societal values and educational objectives.

Globally, counseling approaches have evolved through diverse theoretical perspectives emphasizing the relationship between thought, emotion, and behavior. Approaches such as the psychodynamic model, rooted in Freud's theory of the unconscious, emphasize introspection and the resolution of internal conflicts (Bögels et al., 2014). The humanistic model, inspired by Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1970), focuses on empathy, self-concept, and the actualization of personal potential. Similarly, the client-centered approach empowers students to explore and change their behaviors through dialogue and self-understanding (Rogers, 1980). These models are not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement one another in promoting holistic student development. In Tanzania's context, where many schools lack professionally trained counselors, adopting such frameworks within teacher-counseling roles could enhance student discipline and well-being.

Despite the recognized importance of counseling, questions remain regarding its effectiveness in Tanzanian schools. Empirical data reveal inconsistencies in implementation, particularly concerning the quality of counseling delivery and the adequacy of facilities (Sima, 2002). Many schools rely on volunteer teacher-counselors without formal psychological training, limiting their ability to handle complex emotional and behavioral issues (Elinipenda, 2001). Moreover, the absence of a national counseling framework results in fragmented practices across institutions. Hence, this study investigates the effectiveness of counseling approaches in character building among secondary school students in Kinondoni Municipality, with the aim of identifying practical strategies to improve counseling delivery and outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical and empirical foundations of counseling reveal its critical role in promoting character building among adolescents. This study is anchored on Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that behavior is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Students learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing models teachers, parents, and peers and internalizing their values and actions. Within a school setting, this means that teachers and counselors act as moral exemplars whose consistency, empathy, and behavior directly influence students' moral formation (Bandura, 1969). This framework provides a foundation for understanding how counseling interventions can be structured to facilitate ethical and emotional learning.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the significance of counseling in shaping students' behavior and self-concept. Zunker (2008) emphasizes that counseling promotes autonomy and decision-making skills essential for personal responsibility. Humanistic approaches, according to Giorgi (2005), help learners build empathy, confidence, and resilience, enabling them to manage peer pressure and emotional stress effectively. Similarly, client-centered methods, grounded in unconditional positive regard, allow students to express themselves freely and cultivate intrinsic motivation for change (Rogers, 1980). These approaches collectively foster emotional intelligence and moral reasoning core elements of character building.

Within the Tanzanian educational system, the integration of counseling remains inconsistent. Studies by Nkuba and Kyaruzi (2015) and Ajowi and Simatwa (2010) found that many schools lack qualified counselors and formal structures for psychological support. As a result, disciplinary cases are often managed administratively rather than therapeutically, limiting opportunities for genuine behavioral reform. Yet, when counseling is properly implemented, it contributes significantly to improved student relationships, conflict resolution, and academic engagement. This aligns with Barrett et al. (2013), who noted that counseling interventions strengthen students' adaptive skills and sense of responsibility.

Cross-cultural literature also emphasizes the role of counseling in promoting moral and emotional maturity among adolescents. In Kenya, Birichi and Rukunga (2002) found that guidance programs reduced student misconduct by enhancing self-awareness and self-control. In Nigeria, Akitonye and Jimoh (2020) reported similar results, demonstrating that school-based counseling improves students' interpersonal relationships and learning motivation. In the Tanzanian context, Alutu and Aluede (2006) and Sima (2002) underscore the importance of culturally responsive counseling frameworks that account for social norms and collective responsibility. The incorporation of psychodynamic, humanistic, and client-centered approaches within Tanzanian schools, therefore, represents not only a psychological strategy but also a socio-cultural adaptation to local realities.

Despite these benefits, challenges persist. The shortage of trained counselors, insufficient resources, and lack of policy direction hinder the institutionalization of effective counseling practices (URT, 2009; Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, societal stigma surrounding counseling often perceived as a service for "problematic" students discourages utilization. As a result, the potential of counseling to transform student behavior remains underexploited. Scholars such as Waugh and Onditi (2016) argue that sustainable counseling systems require government policy integration, continuous professional development, and community involvement. Hence, a comprehensive understanding of counseling effectiveness must consider both psychological theories and socio-institutional realities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of counseling approaches in character building among secondary school students. The mixed design was chosen because it allowed triangulation of data combining the numerical precision of quantitative findings with the contextual richness of qualitative insights. A **cross-sectional** case study approach was employed, focusing on public secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality. The target population comprised students, teachers, heads of schools, and parents. From this population, 528 participants were selected through stratified random and purposive sampling techniques to ensure diverse representation in gender, roles, and experience. Questionnaires, interviews, and documentary reviews were used to collect data. The questionnaire captured quantitative data on students' and teachers' perceptions of counseling practices, while interviews and document reviews explored deeper insights into implementation challenges, counselor preparedness, and administrative support for counseling services.

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to determine trends in counseling practices, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically through careful coding, categorization, and synthesis of recurring ideas. The use of mixed methods enhanced both the validity and reliability of the findings by ensuring that different data sources complemented and confirmed one another. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the study participants gave informed consent, confidentiality was maintained, and participation was entirely voluntary. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant educational authorities and the university's ethical review committee. The chosen methodology therefore ensured that the study's conclusions were grounded in both empirical evidence and authentic experiences from stakeholders directly involved in school counseling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that counseling approaches psychodynamic, humanistic, and client-centered play a fundamental role in shaping students' moral and behavioral development. However, the effectiveness of these approaches varied across schools, largely depending on counselor competence, institutional support, and the perception of counseling among students and staff. The analysis indicated that schools that systematically applied counseling principles experienced notable improvements in student discipline, peer relationships, and academic focus. These findings affirm the importance of structured counseling services as integral to holistic education and character formation in Tanzanian secondary schools.

Influence of the Psychodynamic Approach on Student Behavior

The psychodynamic approach emerged as one of the most frequently employed strategies among teacher-counselors. This method, focusing on introspection and understanding underlying emotional conflicts, enabled students to reflect on their behavior, emotions, and motivations. Many students reported that counseling sessions helped them recognize how personal experiences such as family instability or peer influence affected their actions. This finding resonates with the view of Bögels et al. (2014), who argue that psychodynamic interventions enhance self-awareness and emotional regulation among adolescents. From the perspective of Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, the psychodynamic approach allows

learners to observe and internalize emotionally intelligent behavior modeled by counselors, reinforcing self-control and empathy through vicarious learning. Nevertheless, the study found that most teachers lacked the advanced training required to fully operationalize psychodynamic techniques, echoing the concerns raised by Nkuba and Kyaruzi (2015) regarding limited counseling competence in Tanzanian schools.

Role of the Humanistic Approach in Enhancing Empathy and Self-Worth

The humanistic approach demonstrated strong influence in promoting student self-worth, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Teachers who adopted this method created environments characterized by trust and open communication, encouraging students to express emotions and take responsibility for their actions. The results support Rogers' (1961) assertion that unconditional positive regard fosters authentic personal growth and moral awareness. Similarly, Giorgi (2005) found that humanistic counseling enhances interpersonal relationships and reduces behavioral problems. In this study, students exposed to humanistic counseling exhibited improved social interactions and emotional resilience, aligning with Bandura's idea of reciprocal determinism, where cognitive and environmental factors mutually shape behavior. However, the approach faced contextual challenges overcrowded classrooms, lack of privacy, and limited administrative recognition that restricted its implementation. This finding corresponds with Sima's (2002) observation that infrastructural and policy gaps undermine effective counseling delivery in Tanzanian schools.

Impact of the Client-Centered Approach on Student Responsibility and Self-Regulation

The client-centered approach was also found to be effective in nurturing responsible and self-disciplined learners. Teachers employing this approach facilitated sessions that encouraged students to explore their problems, identify solutions, and set personal goals. The emphasis on autonomy and self-reflection empowered students to become active participants in their moral and behavioral development. Rogers (1980) emphasized that empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard are prerequisites for behavioral change a principle confirmed in this study, where students who experienced such counseling reported greater confidence and emotional balance. Consistent with Ajowi and Simatwa (2010), the findings show that when students perceive counselors as non-judgmental allies rather than authority figures, they are more likely to internalize moral values and exhibit prosocial behavior. However, a persistent barrier was the stigma surrounding counseling, which many students viewed as a corrective measure for misconduct rather than a developmental service. This misperception limits the transformative potential of client-centered counseling in schools.

Discussion of Findings

Interpreting these results through the lens of Social Learning Theory, it becomes evident that effective counseling functions as a modeling process in which students learn acceptable behavior by observing and interacting with trusted role models. The study demonstrated that teachers who exemplified empathy, fairness, and emotional stability influenced students' moral choices more profoundly than those who relied on punitive or authoritarian methods. This finding aligns with Bandura's (1977) concept of observational learning students imitate behavior that they perceive as rewarded or respected within their social environment. Thus, the counselor's own conduct becomes a critical pedagogical tool. In contrast, schools lacking

consistent counseling practices or role-modeling behavior often reported higher rates of indiscipline and emotional distress among students, underscoring the importance of environmental reinforcement in character education.

When compared with existing literature, the findings corroborate studies conducted in other African contexts. For instance, Birichi and Rukunga (2002) in Kenya and Akitonye and Jimoh (2020) in Nigeria found that effective counseling programs significantly reduced behavioral problems and enhanced students' moral reasoning. Similarly, Alutu and Aluede (2006) reported that students who participated in well-structured counseling sessions demonstrated greater social responsibility and academic motivation. However, this study also revealed gaps similar to those observed by Waugh and Onditi (2016), particularly concerning policy frameworks and institutional commitment. The limited training of teacher-counselors remains a recurring obstacle, suggesting that without professional development and systemic reform, the potential of counseling to transform student character will remain unrealized.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. Practically, they highlight the necessity for schools to institutionalize counseling as an essential component of education, not merely an auxiliary service. Teachers must receive continuous professional development to strengthen their counseling competence, enabling them to apply theories such as Bandura's in real-life educational contexts. Administratively, schools should provide private counseling spaces, allocate budgets for counseling materials, and integrate character education into school policies. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education should establish clear standards for counselor qualifications, supervision, and evaluation. Finally, these findings underscore the importance of parental and community engagement consistent with Social Learning Theory's emphasis on environmental reinforcement since moral behavior learned at school must be reinforced at home and within the community to achieve lasting transformation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Counseling is a vital element in the holistic development of secondary school students, serving as both an educational and moral tool for guiding behavior and personal growth. It reaffirms that counseling fosters ethical awareness, emotional stability, and social responsibility when practiced within a supportive school environment. Effective counseling must therefore be viewed not as a remedial response to indiscipline but as a proactive, integral part of the learning process. The study further emphasizes that the success of school counseling depends on institutional commitment, professional competence, and community collaboration. When teachers and counselors are adequately trained, ethically grounded, and supported with the necessary resources, schools can become nurturing spaces where students develop the self-awareness and moral reasoning essential for responsible citizenship.

To strengthen the role of counseling in character building, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education institutionalize guidance and counseling services through clear policy frameworks that define standards, ethical codes, and supervision mechanisms. Teacher training programs should integrate counseling psychology to ensure every educator is equipped with basic counseling competencies. Schools should provide private, well-equipped counseling spaces, allocate specific budgets for training and materials, and schedule regular counseling sessions within the academic calendar. Continuous professional development and mentorship for counselors should be encouraged, alongside community sensitization to reduce stigma

surrounding counseling. Finally, collaboration among schools, parents, and local communities should be deepened to ensure that moral and behavioral lessons learned in school are reinforced at home and in society, creating a sustainable foundation for character formation in Tanzanian education.

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