



## **EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES IN PROMOTING STUDENT DISCIPLINE: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CHONGWE DISTRICT, ZAMBIA**

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### **Abstract**

Guidance and counseling services are increasingly recognized as essential components in fostering student discipline, personal growth, and academic success in secondary schools. This study investigates the effectiveness of guidance and counseling programs in promoting discipline among students in selected secondary schools within the Chongwe District of Zambia. Using a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students, the study evaluates the availability, implementation, and perceived impact of these services. Findings reveal that while guidance and counseling programs are present in many schools, their effectiveness is limited by factors such as inadequate staffing, lack of training, low prioritization, and limited student awareness. Nonetheless, schools that implemented structured and consistent counseling interventions reported improvements in student behavior, reduced indiscipline cases, and increased teacher-student cooperation. The study concludes with strategic recommendations for improving the delivery and institutionalization of guidance and counseling services as an integral part of school management systems.

### **Introduction**

The discipline of students in educational settings is a cornerstone for academic achievement, personal development, and social harmony. As secondary schools face increasing challenges related to student misbehavior, absenteeism, bullying, substance abuse, and academic dishonesty, the role of non-punitive disciplinary strategies has become more critical than ever. Among these strategies, guidance and counseling services stand out as proactive and developmental tools aimed at helping students navigate academic, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Globally, the integration of school-based counseling has gained prominence for its ability to address students' psychosocial needs, improve decision-making, and foster responsible behavior. In Zambia, the Ministry of Education has advocated for the establishment and strengthening of guidance and counseling units in all schools, particularly at the secondary level. The underlying policy objective is to promote student well-being, improve academic outcomes, and mitigate disciplinary issues through structured support systems. Despite these intentions, anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that the implementation and effectiveness of school counseling programs vary widely across regions and institutions. While



some schools have robust systems with trained personnel and well-resourced counseling spaces, others lack basic frameworks, staff expertise, or student engagement. The Chongwe District, a semi-urban area with a diverse mix of public and private secondary schools, presents a compelling case for evaluating the state of guidance and counseling services. Reports of rising disciplinary cases among adolescents in the district have triggered concerns among educators, parents, and policymakers about the adequacy of existing intervention mechanisms. Schools in this region grapple with challenges such as inadequate staffing, lack of professional training for teachers acting as counselors, and limited awareness among students about the availability and purpose of counseling services. This study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in promoting student discipline in selected secondary schools in Chongwe District. The objectives of the research are threefold:

1. To assess the availability and structure of guidance and counseling programs in the target schools.
2. To evaluate the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the impact of these services on student behavior.
3. To identify key challenges affecting the implementation and effectiveness of school counseling initiatives.

The significance of the study lies in its potential to inform educational leadership, policy development, and school management practices in Zambia and similar contexts. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and limitations of current counseling interventions, the research offers evidence-based recommendations for improving student support systems. Ultimately, the study advocates for the repositioning of guidance and counseling from a peripheral activity to a central element in the promotion of student discipline and holistic development.

### Research Methodology

This study adopted a **mixed-methods research design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how guidance and counseling services influence student discipline in secondary schools. The design was chosen to capture statistical trends alongside personal experiences and institutional practices.

### Research Setting and Population

The research was conducted in **five secondary schools** in Chongwe District, selected based on accessibility, student population, and availability of guidance and counseling programs. The population comprised school administrators, guidance and counseling teachers, classroom teachers, and students. This diverse sample enabled triangulation of perspectives to ensure reliability of findings.

## Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of **80 participants** were included:

- 5 school administrators
- 10 guidance and counseling teachers
- 15 classroom teachers
- 50 students (randomly selected across grades)

The study utilized **purposive sampling** to select administrators and teachers directly involved in disciplinary or counseling roles, while **simple random sampling** was used to select student respondents to avoid bias.

## Data Collection Instruments

Three main instruments were used:

1. **Questionnaires:** Structured questionnaires were administered to students and classroom teachers. These included both closed-ended and Likert-scale items designed to assess perceptions of counseling effectiveness, types of disciplinary issues encountered, and frequency of counseling sessions.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school administrators and counseling teachers to gain deeper insights into program implementation, resource allocation, and institutional challenges.
3. **Document Review:** School disciplinary records, guidance logs, and minutes from student-counselor meetings were reviewed to identify patterns in behavioral issues and interventions over a six-month period.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (mean, frequency, percentage) to summarize trends. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and subjected to **thematic analysis**, identifying recurring ideas and concerns across participants.

## Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, **informed consent** was obtained from all participants. Ethical approval was secured from the local educational authority. To maintain confidentiality, names of schools and individuals were anonymized. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any stage without consequences. This methodological approach ensured a

balanced and ethical inquiry into the dynamics of guidance and counseling within the context of secondary education in Chongwe.

## Findings and Discussion

The study's findings are categorized into three major themes: (1) availability and structure of guidance and counseling services, (2) perceived impact on student discipline, and (3) challenges affecting effective implementation. The discussion incorporates both quantitative data trends and qualitative insights from key stakeholders.

### 1. Availability and Structure of Guidance and Counseling Services

The study found that **all five schools had established guidance and counseling units**, though the structure and staffing varied widely. Three schools had designated rooms for counseling sessions, while the remaining two operated from shared administrative spaces. Only two schools had formally trained guidance and counseling teachers; the rest relied on classroom teachers assigned to the role without specialized training. Out of the 15 teachers surveyed, **73% acknowledged the presence of counseling services**, but only **40%** believed these services were structured and consistent. Interviews with administrators revealed that counseling sessions were often reactive, initiated only in response to disciplinary incidents rather than as part of a continuous, proactive program.

A head teacher explained: "We have a counseling teacher, but due to teaching loads and no dedicated time slot, the program becomes secondary to academic activities."

The document review supported these findings, with inconsistent records of student sessions, lack of follow-up mechanisms, and minimal integration with the broader school management system.

### 2. Perceived Impact on Student Discipline

Despite structural limitations, **60% of students** indicated they were aware of the availability of counseling services, and **45% reported having accessed them at least once**. Of those who had participated, the majority described the experience as helpful in managing peer conflicts, improving relationships with teachers, and addressing personal or academic stress.

One student noted: "After my session with the counseling teacher, I realized how I had been reacting aggressively. It helped me think before acting."

Among teachers, **80% agreed that students who regularly attended counseling sessions showed noticeable improvement** in behavior, class participation, and interpersonal relationships. However, they emphasized that these positive changes were more prevalent in schools with active, visible counseling programs. Furthermore, schools with scheduled life skills sessions reported fewer cases of repeated disciplinary offenses. These sessions, often

integrated with counseling, addressed topics such as emotional intelligence, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

However, a gap in awareness remained. **35% of student respondents did not understand the full scope of guidance and counseling services**, with some perceiving it as a disciplinary measure rather than a support mechanism. This misunderstanding was reflected in teacher responses as well. Several admitted to using counseling as a last resort after punitive actions failed, indicating a need to reframe the role of counseling from corrective to preventive and developmental.

### 3. Challenges Affecting Implementation

The effectiveness of counseling services was found to be hindered by a range of systemic and institutional challenges:

- **Inadequate Training:** Only 2 of the 10 teachers in guidance roles had undergone formal training in counseling. The rest relied on general pedagogical skills and self-taught techniques. As a result, sessions often lacked structure and psychological depth.
- **Workload and Role Conflict:** Counseling teachers were also full-time subject teachers with no reduction in workload. This dual role affected the consistency of counseling sessions, follow-ups, and student engagement.
- **Lack of Resources:** Schools lacked materials such as counseling manuals, confidential reporting tools, and private consultation spaces. Counseling was often conducted in open environments, compromising privacy and deterring students from seeking help.
- **Low Institutional Priority:** Counseling was not treated as a core function of school leadership. Budgets for training, space allocation, or dedicated periods were either absent or insufficient. Without strong administrative support, counseling remained an informal activity.
- **Cultural Perceptions:** A notable barrier identified during interviews was the **stigmatization of counseling**. In some communities, seeking counseling was associated with weakness or serious misconduct. This cultural bias discouraged students, especially boys, from accessing support services.

### Discussion

The findings echo broader research from sub-Saharan Africa indicating that guidance and counseling services, though present, are often marginalized in school systems. When effectively delivered, they foster trust, reduce behavioral issues, and enhance emotional resilience. However, when under-resourced and inconsistently applied, their impact becomes minimal. The positive behavioral changes observed in schools with structured guidance





programs suggest that counseling can significantly contribute to student discipline. These schools demonstrated how even modest initiatives—like weekly life skills sessions and peer counseling clubs—can transform school culture. Nevertheless, the absence of trained personnel, limited student awareness, and lack of administrative prioritization reduce the reach and influence of these services. The challenges identified in Chongwe reflect a national trend where policy advocacy is not matched by implementation frameworks. To institutionalize counseling as a key component of discipline management, there must be deliberate efforts at policy enforcement, professional development, and cultural reorientation. Guidance and counseling should not be viewed as optional or remedial but as a proactive educational function that nurtures self-regulation and citizenship among students.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that guidance and counseling services play a pivotal role in promoting student discipline when properly implemented. In the secondary schools of Chongwe District, these services have contributed to improved student behavior, better teacher-student relationships, and enhanced emotional well-being. However, the degree of impact varies significantly depending on the structure, frequency, and professionalism of the programs in place. Despite the presence of counseling units in all the studied schools, challenges such as lack of trained personnel, poor infrastructure, limited student awareness, and low administrative prioritization undermine the effectiveness of these interventions. Counseling often remains a reactive, informal activity rather than an integrated, preventive strategy embedded in school culture. To truly harness the potential of guidance and counseling in shaping disciplined, responsible learners, a paradigm shift is required—one that elevates counseling to a central role in school management, alongside academics and administration.

### Recommendations

1. **Capacity Building for Counseling Staff** The Ministry of Education should prioritize the training and certification of guidance and counseling teachers. Short-term courses and continuous professional development programs must be instituted.
2. **Dedicated Resources and Infrastructure** Schools should allocate private spaces for counseling and invest in essential materials such as manuals, records, and confidential reporting systems.
3. **Scheduling and Policy Support** Counseling sessions must be formally integrated into school timetables, supported by clear policies on student support and behavioral management.
4. **Student Sensitization** Awareness programs should be conducted to destigmatize counseling and educate students on its benefits as a safe and supportive tool for personal growth.



5. **Monitoring and Evaluation** School authorities must establish monitoring mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of counseling programs and make data-driven improvements.

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