

A cross-sectional study evaluated the implementation of counseling skills among middle school teachers in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

The function of guidance and psychological counseling for students is one of the crucial duties that teachers in secondary schools frequently assume in addition to their teaching responsibilities. To fulfill their roles and responsibilities effectively, teachers must receive training and practice in providing psychological therapy to students. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the psychological counseling skills of teachers regarding two groups of skills: fundamental skills and specialized skills. A total of 456 middle school teachers participated in the qualitative study in Dak Nong, Vietnam. According to the study's findings, most teachers considered the performance of counseling skills as good. There have been various proposals for the development of teacher training programs and development in counseling skills. Future research must focus further on the subjective and objective elements that influence the psychological counseling skills of teachers.

Keywords: counselling skills, teachers, school counselling, students.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a worldwide problem of special significance to health, education, and other programs and strategies. Adolescents and students are the age group that receives much attention from scholars, educators, medical professionals, etc. Students receive much consideration because they are future leaders and encounter several mental health issues during their learning and growth. In addition, (Mosia, 2015) believed that adolescence is a developmental transition from childhood to maturity and that children experience various emotional and psychological issues. Increasing numbers of high school students worldwide are confronted with developmental obstacles such as school violence, suicide, behavioral problems, emotional difficulties, and youth problems (Dahlberg & Philippot, 2008). Recent studies have shown that 10 to 20% of students experience emotional and behavioral issues (Thompson et al., 2000). Many struggling students get no assistance from certified specialists or teachers (Adelman & Taylor, 2009). Depending on the severity and duration of the difficult or challenging behavior, the proportion of school-aged children requiring counseling and intervention help varies (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). It is well known that one of the schools' fundamental objectives is students' psychological development (Malikiosi-Loizou, 2001). Through psychological therapy, schools play a significant role in developing students' social, emotional, moral, and psychological well-being. According to (Santrock, 2008), through school psychology counseling, teachers may also assist

learners in developing their own learning goals and career development strategies by supporting them in recognizing their abilities and hobbies. In addition to topic teaching, teachers are entrusted with several obligations, including psychological therapy for students. Teachers are most suited to encourage children's social and emotional development (McLaughlin, 1999). Difficult problems can be easily discovered because the majority of students spend much time in school, teachers have long-term interaction with children and know about childhood development. Also, teachers have access to several support networks that guide and assist students in overcoming these challenges through self-help, referrals, and specialized education and training programs. Teachers are additionally individuals who can readily interact with parents regarding student

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concerns. In reality, teachers possess the same traits as counselors, including the capacity to sympathize with students, patience and adaptability, strong communication skills, and an inquiring discussion (Gouleta, 2006). Teachers must have knowledge and abilities in the field of psychological therapy in order to perform the aforementioned responsibilities. Counseling helps the emotional side of education because it facilitates good student communication for learning (Le Roux, 2002). In addition, it enables teachers to give emotional support to students so that they can recognize and manage academic and psychosocial challenges (Malikiosi-Loizou, 2001).

Counseling in schools is vital for resolving student problems and implementing successful preventative techniques, such as those for preventing substance abuse. School counseling includes aspects that distinguish that from formal counseling by licensed professionals. Because of the rapid nature of therapy sessions, teachers and parents frequently begin counseling sessions rather than the child or adolescent. A fifth distinction of school counseling is that it comprises various supporting measures routinely employed in schools, ranging from guiding and counseling to support and direction. Hence, counseling concepts and strategies must be modified for school success.

Several middle schools provide guidance and counseling duties to homeroom teachers. Counsel and guidance are two distinct meanings. Teaching refers to helping students develop holistically and preventative, whereas counseling is more supportive and rehabilitative (Lai-Yeung, 2014). Individual counseling is a crucial practice that should be incorporated in all schools, according to (Mosley, 1993). (Trần & Kiêu, 2012) argued that psychological therapy is an interactive process between the counselor and the student in which the counselor and student exchange abilities to assist the student in understanding and accepting reality and identifying problem-solving potential. Psychological therapy is an activity that emphasizes promoting healthy living, enhancing personal and professional relationships, and addressing mental illness-related issues (Sinh, 2005). According to (Oviogbodu, 2015), counseling assists individuals in resolving difficulties connected to feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. Nevertheless, according to other viewpoints, counseling is the connection or relationship between two or more persons to establish a trustworthy relationship with the client (Oviogbodu, 2015). Counseling is a procedure that assists in the development, maturation, and progression of persons in their educational, professional, and personal social endeavors (Egbo, 2013). Counseling is an individual procedure in which others assist an individual in enhancing their understanding and problem-solving skills. Counseling is a presupposed meta-cognitive ability (Ridley et al., 2011), aiding students in self-evaluation and reflection based on their knowledge, attitudes, and abilities.

Counseling is a skill comprised of outcome-focused cognitive, emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral components (Ridley et al., 2011). Counseling is a practical science that aims to assist individuals in overcoming their challenges so that they can live freely in society using their life skills and talents (Trần & Kiêu, 2012).

School counseling is considered a crucial aspect of the educational process (Ianni, 2003), and teachers must have appropriate counseling skills training. School counseling is based on psychological principles and abilities utilized in an educational environment (Alao et al., 2010). Student counseling is a procedure that assists students in comprehending and clarifying challenges and emotions that hinder their natural growth. School counselors must constantly address sensitive student concerns, such as romantic relationships, substance misuse, sexual activity, parental and child interactions, and self-injurious behaviors. According to (Njoka, 2007), school counseling is described as activities that assist students in coping with frustrations or issues that impede their normal growth and learning at school. School counselors utilize specialized talents to assist adolescents who can assist themselves more effectively (Gillis, 1992). The degree to which the school counseling program is incorporated within the school framework is a crucial characteristic of school counseling. Nonetheless, (Lang, 2013) argued that even though school counseling should be integrated into the school system, it should remain autonomous and adhere to ethical values such as confidentiality. Various legal requirements have been identified as a serious concern that requires the attention of both students and advisors in that they must unavoidably impose restrictions on the scope of the consulting interaction and anonymity.

School counseling involves assisting students individually or in small groups to address their issues or difficulties. Counseling students is a responsibility of secondary schools and a worldwide tendency (Lam & Hui, 2010). Hence teachers in some nations must possess counseling abilities (Hornby et al., 2003). All teachers must learn fundamental counseling abilities and professional counseling knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities and roles in teaching personal and social education (McGuiness, 1998). Mentorship skills training for teachers improves teaching sensitivity and helps support students (Kottler & Kottler, 2006). Teachers may only need to study counseling in depth. However, they should be accountable for enhancing their talents, cultivating some of the skills required for effective counseling, and building positive connections with students. The teacher's counseling job is especially difficult because teachers frequently perform counseling in conjunction with educating (McLeod & McLeod, 2015). Teachers must assume several roles, including educator, career counselor, caregiver, and authority figure (Kottler & Kottler, 2006). Instructors with counseling skills assist

students in developing their innovative abilities and problem-solving capabilities (Kottler & Kottler, 2006). Because all teachers counsel students to different degrees, all teachers must take counseling classes to receive counseling training. According to (Lang, 2013), there are four stages of school counseling: (1) use of counseling skills in the classroom to provide a pleasant learning environment and improve self-esteem; (2) use of counseling skills to help students solve everyday problems and facilitate group activities; (3) is individual or small group counseling from a trained professional such as a school counselor or homeroom teacher; and (4) support networks to help students access professionals outside of school, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, for professional help. In order to assume the roles of classroom and tutoring teachers, all teachers must acquire fundamental counseling abilities. More training in counseling skills is also necessary to provide comprehensive counseling and a professional support network for students.

According to (McGuinness, 1998), counseling skills are vital and required for teachers to become effective professionals. Teachers are involved in identifying and monitoring at-risk students, supporting them with issues, and organizing support for children outside school. It is a common misconception that counseling involves delivering advice and suggestions and influencing the client's values, attitudes, hobbies, and beliefs. However, essential counseling abilities include competency, acceptance, adaptability, honesty, sensitivity, listening, empathy, confidentiality, and comprehension. (Zastrow, 2003) identified counseling abilities as interactive skills during the problem-solving process's stages. In this approach, the counselor primarily uses active listening, empathy, and questioning skills to assist the client in analyzing and making optimum decisions. The aforementioned research indicates that there are several methods for psychological counseling skills. In accordance with their difficulty, counseling abilities are also ranked from low to high (Esther, 2004). Psychological counseling abilities are demonstrated via particular attitudes and actions that develop cooperative partnerships and increase subject awareness. Using a problem-solving strategy, (Yeo, 1993) provided a set of skills relating to establishing relationships and intervention skills to assist subjects in perceiving and constructing objectives. According to (Esther, 2004), psychological counseling abilities are categorized into four categories: fundamental, intermediate, advanced, and professional. Basic psychological counseling abilities are the foundation for intermediate or advanced skills, such as attention, listening, encouraging, feedback, asking and sharing information, handling quiet, summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing. Similarly, (Nelson-Jones, 2015) considered basic psychological counseling skills to be fundamental problem-solving abilities that serve several tasks.

These are some counseling skills a teacher should obtain:

Listening Skills: This is a four-step procedure in which the client's worries, needs, and feelings are expressed and clarified (Okun, 1997). The five fundamental components of active listening are minimal answers, contemplation, questioning, summarizing, and paraphrasing (Geldard et al., 2019). Attention should be paid to the problem the client is presenting; notice and identify the client's behavior, gestures, and emotions and understand their nonverbal actions; provide appropriate feedback; Ask clarifying questions or offer a story.

Questioning skills: the most crucial aspect of communication skills is the ability to ask questions (Geldard et al., 2019). It may be closed or opened (Parson & Zhang, 2014). It can be reasonable and adaptable to utilize a variety of questions kinds, including many open-ended questions. The purpose of open-ended questions in communication is to help advise clients to clarify their concerns rather than to provide information to the listener (Parson & Zhang, 2014). (Hamilton & Dinat, 2007) claimed that repeatedly giving birth or quoting information a child already knows can leave a child feeling threatened and exposed.

Observation skills: included monitoring overall appearance, behavior, style of speaking, moods, and emotions; consistency between words and facial expressions and gestures; focusing attention when observing and observing continually.

Empathetic skills: (Rogers, 1961) considered empathetic comprehension, empathy, and unconditional positive appreciation essential prerequisites for effective learning. (Rogers, 1995) defined empathy as properly recognizing the inner worlds of students and comprehending their feelings as though they were their own. According to (Dymond, 1949), it is the capacity to experience and articulate the thoughts and emotions of another person by placing oneself in their shoes and viewing the world from their perspective. Accepting the client's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives; listening to, acknowledging, and respecting the client's values, beliefs, and thinking.

Early detection skills: teachers notice problems developing in students, identify students with behavioral and emotional issues, and evaluate data received by merging many sources of information.

Skills in building and organizing psychological counseling activities in schools: this skill includes expressions such as collecting, analyzing, and evaluating outstanding problems of students in school; organizing and designing prevention and resource mobilization programs; deploying the school; setting goals and objectives, and allocating time for implementation.

Skills in coordinating educational forces: teachers have a role in assessing the educational workforce's significance in enhancing their clients' status. They must monitor and make modifications as necessary.

Skills in psychological record-keeping and record - keeping: teachers must construct clear and scientific archival forms, preserve information safely and securely, and update the client's modifications or the counselor's new intervention tactics regularly.

According to the results of a search in the relevant academic literature on the requirements for teacher training in counseling and the degree of practice in counseling skills, there needs to be more study on this subject in Vietnam. The vast majority of the studies concentrate on various issues regarding psychological counseling, such as the importance of developing a counseling model specifically for high school students (Nguyen-Thi et al., 2020). Huynh and Tran-Chi (2019) discovered that high school students encountering obstacles in their studies must be consulted regarding these obstacles. In addition, research was conducted in Vietnam on various other issues, including evaluating teachers' skills to provide career counseling to high

school students (Thi, 2021) and strategies for increasing the size of the school counseling staff (Hong et al., 2018). During the teaching process, teachers must be aware of students' negative emotions, provide appropriate support, and devise methods to alleviate those negative emotions (Luu-Thi et al., 2021). This research was conducted to determine the extent to which middle school teachers utilize their psychological counseling abilities through the lens of two primary skill categories: fundamental and specialized skills.

METHODS

Participant

The sample was randomly selected at eight secondary schools in Dak Nong province, Vietnam. A total of 456 teachers was recruited after removing uncompleted surveys.

	Secondary Schools	Teachers (N)
1	Dak Buk So secondary schools	60
2	Nguyen Du secondary schools	61
3	Tran Phu secondary schools	83
4	Chu Van An secondary schools	40
5	Nguyen Tat Thanh secondary schools	58
6	Nguyen Chi Thanh secondary schools	63
7	Pham Hong Thai secondary schools	45
8	Nam Da secondary schools	46
	Total	456

Procedure

A quantitative methodology analyzed the data. Teachers volunteered the participation. Voluntaries were informed about the purpose of the study, risks, and usefulness of the study. The participants were also assured confidentiality and anonymity when conducting the survey. Before starting the survey, the participants would be guided on how to the questionnaire by the researcher. The researcher would explain any question regarding the study by participants. The teachers were required to provide demographic information, including age, gender, school name, ... The time spent to complete the survey last 10 -15 minutes.

Measurement

The questionnaire was designed to assess the level of performance of homeroom teachers' psychological counseling skills for two main skill groups: (1) Fundamental skills, including listening, observation, questioning, empathy, and silence handling; (2) a group of specialized skills including skills to develop and organize preventive activities, skills to assess student psychology, skills to coordinate educational forces, and finally skills to plan and store. The Likert 5 scale was used a 1 to 5 scale (1 = Very good, 2 = Good, 3 = Fair, 4 = Poor, and 5 = Extremely poor).

RESULTS

Table 1: The level of implementation of counseling skills of the homeroom teacher.

	Level	N	%
1	Very Poor	0	0
2	Poor	0	0
3	Fair	38	8.4
4	Good	178	39.0
5	Very Good	240	52.6
	Total	456	100.0

Table 1 revealed that 52.6% (n=240) of homeroom teachers self-assessed the degree of counseling skills implementation as very good. In addition, 39.0% of

teachers rated their level of implementation of counseling skills as good, fair (8.4%), and none as poor or very poor.

Table 2: The homeroom teacher's level of implementation of counseling skills is based on two skill groups.

Skills	Mean	SD	
Fundamental skills	Listening Skills	3.72	0.792
	Observation skills	3.77	0.771
	Questioning skills:	3.73	0.758
	Empathetic skills	3.70	0.767
	Skills to handle silent circumstances	3.71	0.777
	Early detection skills	3.71	0.700
Special skills	Skills in building and organizing psychological counseling activities in schools	3.70	0.770
	Psychological assessment skills	3.64	0.740
	Skills in coordinating educational forces	3.68	0.804
	Skills in psychological record-keeping and record - keeping	3.65	0.834
	Total	3.70	0.706

Most counseling skills were regarded as excellent, as seen in Table 2. That is, the teacher has mastered the skills' substance, purposes, and procedures, as well as the manipulations and expressions of the skills thoroughly, precisely, and with considerable flexibility.

The average score for the teacher's observation skills is 3.77 (SD = 0.771) within the group of fundamental counseling skills. Followed by questioning skills with a mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.758), listening skills with a mean score of 3.72 (SD = 0.792), and handling of silent circumstances with a mean score of 3.71 (SD = 0.777). The basic skills group measured the lowest level of empathetic skills, with a mean score of 3.70 (SD = 0.767).

In addition, within the group of specialist counseling abilities, instructors rated early detection as the competence with the highest average score (3.71; SD = 0.700): early detection. Other skill groups were also evaluated favorably, including skills in building, and organizing preventive activities with a mean score of 3.70 (SD = 0.770), skills in coordinating educational forces with a mean score of 3.68 (SD = 0.804), and skills in psychological record-keeping and record - keeping with a mean score of 3.65 (SD = 0.834). Regarding homeroom teachers' utilization of psychological counseling skills, student psychological assessment skills are evaluated at the lowest level, with a mean score of 3.64 (SD = 0.740).

DISCUSSION

The survey results indicated that most teachers self-evaluate their level of application of basic and advanced counseling skills as being good. According to the findings, teachers evaluated the degree of counseling abilities as good. According to prior research, counseling improves teachers and their students. (Fox & Butler, 2003) also discovered that 97% of respondents had seen the school's counseling service for students as extremely beneficial. Several studies claimed that the necessity to train teachers in counseling skills (Chan, 2005; Lang, 2013;

McLaughlin, 1999). In the study conducted by Montgomery (2003), it was discovered that instructors had an entirely favorable view of psychological therapy in schools. (Watkins et al., 2001) discovered that teachers regard counseling as a crucial resource for addressing students' emotional concerns. In the international research conducted by (Harris, 2013) in Germany, Denmark, Hong Kong, Ghana, and Saudi Arabia, counseling is provided by experienced teachers with postgraduate degrees. According to the study, self-identified teachers have average confidence in their counseling skills. In accordance with research conducted in Greece, teachers do not have the opportunity to develop counseling skills throughout their education or in-service training (Malikiosi-Loizou, 2001). Besides, (Lines, 2011) showed that even though teachers may attempt to give counseling services to students, they are not prepared to provide these services in schools since they need professional training. In contrast, (Mosia, 2015) claimed that professors provide minimal guidance or disregard challenging circumstances involving students who require counseling. Teachers would rather use illegal physical punishment than psychological counseling skills to control aberrant student conduct. (Gouleta, 2006) also indicated that teachers refer students to unnecessary counseling services while counseling students on simple concerns.

The findings revealed that the fundamental skills group and the specialist skill group, were rated as performing well. Even though teachers must be competent in counseling by knowing counseling theory and procedures, they must also exhibit specific characteristics which make them appropriate for this position (Gouleta, 2006). For instance, a consultant is expected to possess respect and sensitivity. Additional traits include self-perception, competence, commitment skills kinds, and self-assurance. Consultants are crucial in providing clients with excellent therapy (Parson & Zhang, 2014). Acquiring empathy and other counseling skills, such as questioning, and summarizing appropriate acronyms and interpretations, contribute to the growth of

compassion and understanding (Ivey et al., 2013). Research indicates that teachers who display positive respect and sympathy create more student opportunities. Also, students value professors who use counseling abilities to assist them (McLaughlin, 1999). The characteristics mentioned above showed a caring (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) which creates a sense of safety and acceptance in students (Gatongi, 2007). Due to the sensitivity of certain counseling concerns, Parson and Zhang (2014) argued that counselors must be courageous and self-assured. In order to satisfy the requirements of these students, teachers believe that empathy and respect for each individual are essential qualities (Humphrey et al., 2006). Despite having gained an empathetic understanding, it has been discovered that teachers are unable to use all counseling skills in practice. It has been established that providing feedback to student teachers attempting to integrate training-acquired information and behavioral styles is essential to building the circumstances for effective communication (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Rogers and Freiberg (1994) discovered that teachers' empathy, acquiescence, and unconditional positive regard relate to enhanced academic success. Effective listening conveys a teacher's empathetic and unconditionally positive attributes (Gatongi, 2007). Teachers with a high level of empathy are more sensitive to their students' emotions and have a more optimistic self-concept (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Observing, listening, and communication skills, among other skills and abilities, are crucial for anybody functioning as a consultant. While communication and listening skills are essential, the counseling session should continually emphasize observational skills (Cormier & Hackney, 2016; Geldard et al., 2019). This suggested that the counselor must be able to monitor the adolescent's exterior and interior. (Cormier & Hackney, 2016) argued that high school counselors must be able to watch, identify, and comprehend both verbal and nonverbal student behavior.

Implication and Limitation

Numerous study limitations were explored. First, this study's results only indicate some instructors in Vietnam, as the research was limited to a single province. Future studies should involve a larger sample size. This quantitative study was conducted based on teachers' self-reports so that future research may be conducted. Hence, more qualitative and experimental research might be conducted to evaluate the efficacy of teachers' counseling skills. In addition, the study primarily examines the amount of application of teachers' counseling skills based on teachers' self-reports; future research should incorporate student and parent evaluations. In addition, more research should be conducted to examine other topics related to the application of counseling skills by teachers, such as variables influencing the efficacy of counseling skills

practice and programs designed to enhance teachers' counseling skills.

Despite limitations, this study has brought about undeniable practical implications. The results of this study provide some understanding of how teachers see their real function and counseling methods in school psychology. The study's findings have substantially contributed to global data sources in general and Vietnam's data sources. The study's findings highlight the psychological counseling skills required of homeroom teachers in student development strategies and policies and in teacher training and development programs. In addition, the research recommended combining the responsibilities of homeroom teachers, school counselors, and school administrators in delivering counseling services to students and strengthening teacher professional development activities. In order to encourage teachers to participate in student psychological counseling, research indicated that on-the-job training and the development of counseling skills are also essential. Education systems and secondary schools must have a teacher professional development program to address teacher training needs in counseling skills and other training needs resulting from education reform.

CONCLUSION

The role of teachers in psychological counseling activities for students, in addition to teaching and other caring and sharing responsibilities, is growing in importance. In order to fulfill their roles and responsibilities successfully, teachers must be provided with and taught counseling skills during in-service education. The research determined the real level of teachers' counseling skills. According to this study's findings, most instructors are effective in their psychological counseling skills for students in two primary skill categories: fundamental skills and specialized skills. This study has contributed to the literature by focusing on the existing situation of teachers' psychological counseling skills and the need for counseling training for teachers. The research highlights what must be addressed while establishing educational programs and training teachers.

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