

## Pupils' Perceptions Towards Guidance and Counselling Services Offered in the Northern Hhohho High Schools in Eswatini

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### Abstract

*Guidance and counselling (GC) services represent a central pillar of classroom support, playing a crucial role in addressing pupils' psychological and emotional needs. Despite their importance, limited research has been conducted on pupils' perceptions of guidance and counselling services in Eswatini. This study, therefore, aimed to explore the perceptions of pupils regarding the GC services offered in senior secondary schools within the Northern Hhohho region. A descriptive research design was employed, utilizing a self-administered questionnaire for data collection. The study sample consisted of 141 Form Five pupils, who were selected to participate. To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was reviewed by a panel of experts comprising two lecturers from the University of Eswatini and one guidance and counselling inspector from the Ministry of Education and Training. The inter-item reliability of the instrument was tested using a sample of 20 students from a school not included in the main study. The reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of  $r = .75$ , indicating acceptable reliability. The findings revealed that while pupils were generally aware of the functions of GC services, the lack of private counselling venues in many schools hindered the effective utilisation of these services. Based on these findings, the study concluded that pupils face significant barriers to fully accessing guidance and counselling services. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training provide additional counselling seminars and professional development opportunities for GC teachers.*

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### Introduction

The transition from childhood to adulthood is often accompanied by numerous challenges (Tsikati, 2018). In today's rapidly changing and increasingly complex world, students face mounting demands that impact their educational experience. Globally, many students grapple with socio-economic, personal, psychological, and academic issues that disrupt their learning processes (Momanyi, 2013). As a result, poor academic performance and difficulty adapting to school environments often lead to high dropout rates (Otwel & Millins, 1997). The growing complexity of student challenges, compounded by prevailing economic hardships, underscores the urgent need for effective counselling services—now more critical than ever (Tsikati, 2018). Guidance and counselling are recognized as essential components across all educational levels—whether elementary, secondary, or tertiary, and regardless of whether education is formal or informal (Ibrahim et al., 2014; Nkechi, Ewomaoghene & Egenti, 2016).

However, as Mutie and Ndambuki (2002) observe, students' misconceptions about the role and value of guidance and counselling have contributed to the ineffectiveness of these programmes. Cultivating a positive perception is vital, as students are more likely to voluntarily utilize counselling services when they understand and appreciate their importance. Yunis (2006) emphasizes that students' attitudes toward help-seeking significantly influence the use of counselling resources such as private spaces, educational materials, and visual aids. Thus, fostering positive attitudes towards counselling is essential for its success. Effective school counselling, as a strategy for supporting student well-being and behavior, largely depends on student perceptions and their willingness to engage. Without acceptance and active participation, counselling cannot bring about the intended positive change.

The Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini has intensified efforts to strengthen the Guidance and Counselling Life Skills Education Programme across schools, including Northern Hhohho, by introducing a revised syllabus approved in 2016 following the abolition of corporal punishment. This initiative is supported by the distribution of life skills teachers' handbooks to facilitate the implementation of the programme. The programme recognizes the need to equip students with life skills and guidance to navigate the complexities of adolescence and prepare them for adulthood, especially amidst increasing social, educational, and psychological challenges such as abuse, dropout, and mental health concerns. Policies like the Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2019) emphasize guidance and counselling as a cross-cutting, developmental service within all levels of education, aiming to foster holistic student development and safe transitions into adult roles. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (2010/2022) also highlights the need for collaboration among counselors, teachers, and parents to address learners' challenges. At the senior secondary level, guidance becomes more focused on career planning and the internalization of values as students approach adulthood. Against this background, the study aims to explore students' perceptions of the guidance and counselling services offered in schools, the nature of these services, and their perceived benefits—particularly in light of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of pupils towards the guidance and counseling services offered in the Northern Hhohho secondary schools.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. describe the respondents by their demographic characteristics and background information;
2. determine pupils' perceptions towards the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools;
3. determine the benefits of guidance and counselling to pupils;
4. determine if there is significant difference on the pupils' perception the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools by their demographic characteristics and background information; and
5. identify strategies to improve guidance and counselling services in schools

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

#### ***Hypothesis 1***

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference between the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and sex of the respondents

Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>): There is a significant difference between the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and sex of the respondents.

### **Hypothesis 2**

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference between the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and age of the respondents

Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>): There is a significant difference between the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and age of the respondents.

### **Hypothesis 3**

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant difference between the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and number of years in the current school by the respondents

Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>): There is a significant difference between the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and number of years in the current school by the respondents

### **Methodology**

The design of the study was descriptive survey employing a questionnaire in data collection. A sample of form five students (n=141) was drawn from a target population of 557 students from eight schools for the quantitative data in the Madlangampisi cluster under the Northern Hhohho region of Eswatini. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970)'s table of determining sample sizes.

The questionnaire had items aligned to the objectives and measured using the Likert-type Scale. Respondents were required to circle the appropriate option regarding the demographic characteristics and background information variables. The content validity of the self-administered questionnaire was established using a panel of experts: two Lecturers from the University of Eswatini [one from the Department of Consumer Science Education and Community Development and the other from Agricultural Education and Extension] and one Guidance and Counselling inspectors from the Ministry of Education and Training in the Hhohho region. To establish reliability the questionnaire was pilot tested in one high school which was not part of those schools being studied using 20 students who were randomly chosen. Cronbach Alpha was used to established the inter-item reliability coefficient and was found to be  $r=.75$ .

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires between August 25 and September 16, 2021, with prior calls and follow-up visits to each school. Before delivering the questionnaires, the researcher obtained permission from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and school principals through formal letters. After securing a research permit and introduction letters, the researcher hand-delivered the questionnaires with cover letters to school counsellor teachers, who were asked to distribute them to Form Five students. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and safeguarding confidentiality and anonymity by avoiding the use of names and presenting data in grouped form. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, and no psychological harm was inflicted. The total response was 100%, indicating that all questionnaires received were usable. The Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS version 20 was employed to analyse data using descriptive statistics [such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations] and inferential statistics [independent t-test and Analysis of variance Variance (ANOVA)]. The data were presented using tables.

## Findings and Discussions

The findings and discussions of the study were presented guided by the objectives of the study.

### *Demographic Characteristics of Pupils*

Table 1 depicts that most of the respondents were female students (n=89, 63.8%) while 52 were male respondents (36.2%). A majority of the pupils (n=77) were aged between 18-20 years (54.6%). Lastly, most of the students had spent 3-5 years (n=99, 70.2%) in the school.

**Table 1:**

*Demographic Characteristics and background information of Pupils (n=141)*

<b>Demographic Characteristics and background information</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Sex</i></b>		
Male	52	36.2
Female	89	63.8
<b><i>Age</i></b>		
15-17 years	24	17.0
18-20 years	77	54.6
21 years and above	40	28.4
<b><i>Years in current school</i></b>		
1 – 2 years	28	19.9
3 – 5 years	99	70.2
6 and above	14	9.9

### **The perceptions of pupils towards the guidance and counselling services offered in their school**

Table 2 indicates that the following were prominent perceptions of pupils towards the guidance and counselling services offered in their school: Guidance and counselling (GC) services should be made available to students in every schools ( $\bar{x} = 5.48, s=0.64$ ); Helps me to learn manners and etiquettes ( $\bar{x} = 5.20, s=0.78$ ); GC services help students with their problems at school and at home ( $\bar{x} = 4.99, s=0.73$ ); GC services help students set realistic academic goals ( $\bar{x} = 4.94, s=0.81$ ); GC makes me know how to get along well with others ( $\bar{x} = 4.90, s=0.92$ ); GC makes me understand myself better ( $\bar{x} = 4.94, s=0.81$ ); GC assist pupils to address the challenges that I face ( $\bar{x} = 4.88, s=0.88$ ); GC services should be made compulsory for every student ( $\bar{x} = 4.84, s=0.78$ ); GC services enables pupils to talk on their confidential information ( $\bar{x} = 4.84, s=0.94$ ); and GC locate higher educational and training opportunities by providing the necessary advice, skills and information ( $\bar{x} = 4.82, s=0.94$ ). The participants also agreed with the following: GC services help students balance between academic work and extracurricular activities ( $\bar{x} = 4.69, s=0.80$ ); pupils are fully aware of the functions of guidance ( $\bar{x} = 4.66, s=0.55$ ); The counselor teacher has good approach to student ( $\bar{x} = 4.63, s=$ ); GC develops effective study skills ( $\bar{x} = 4.61, s=0.96$ ); GC counselors motivate pupils to use these services ( $\bar{x} = 4.61, s=0.63$ ); and GC helps to inform them about various jobs and openings available, the qualification ( $\bar{x} = 4.53, s=0.79$ ).

The findings of the study support those of Gitonga (1999), which indicated that the majority of participants were aware of the availability of guidance and counseling services. Rutondoki (2000) found out that although students generally have a favourable perception and attitude towards counselling related services, only a few have a basic awareness of what opportunities are offered. In the study, it also emerged that some students did not seek help because they felt capable of solving their issues or getting help from their friends. Similarly, Nyokabi and

Thinguri (2015) reported that the majority of students were aware of existing programmes and held positive attitudes towards them. These positive perceptions of guidance and counseling services may be influenced by awareness of their availability and functionality, as well as motivation provided by counselors to utilize the services. Additionally, students' access to media information about guidance and counseling services could also play a role (Eyo et al., 2010).

**Table 2:**

*The perceptions of pupils towards the guidance and counselling services offered in their school*

<b>Descriptive statistics</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>s</b>	<b>DE</b>
GC should be made available to students in every school	5.48	0.64	A
GC helps me to learn manners and etiquettes	5.20	0.78	A
GC services help students with their problems at school and at home	4.99	0.73	A
GC makes students understand themselves better	4.94	0.81	A
GC services help students set realistic academic goals	4.94	0.81	A
GC makes students know how to get along well with others	4.90	0.92	A
GC assist me to address the challenges that I face	4.88	0.88	A
GC services should be made compulsory for every student	4.84	0.78	A
GC services enable pupils to talk on their confidential information	4.84	0.94	A
GC locate higher educational and training opportunities by providing the necessary advice, skills and information	4.82	0.89	A
GC services help students balance between academic work and extracurricular activities	4.69	0.80	A
Students are fully aware of the function's guidance	4.66	0.55	A
The counselor teacher has a good approach to student	4.63	0.82	A
GC develops effective study skills	4.61	0.96	A
GC counselors motivate pupils to use these services	4.61	0.63	A
The counselor teacher has good questioning skills of students.	4.58	0.81	A
GC helps to inform them about various jobs and openings available, the qualification	4.53	0.79	A
The counselor teacher has strong positive student- counsellor relationship	4.38	0.69	SLA
GC services should be offered by independent counsellors	4.36	0.72	SLA
The counselor teacher puts students' interests at heart	4.33	0.67	SLA

GC helps such students to adjust and utilize the guidance facilities available fully	4.24	0.81	SLA
GC services help students with problems involving teachers	4.18	0.96	SLA
Media information on guidance and counselling services influences the students	4.18	0.87	SLA
The counselor teacher respects student's right for confidentiality	4.15	0.56	SLA
GC services should be offered by all teachers even if they are not counselor teachers	2.71	0.86	SLD
<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>A</b>

**Legend:** Descriptive Equivalent (DE); 0-1.4 = Strongly disagree (SD); 1.5-2.4 = Disagree (D); 2.5- 3.4 = Slightly disagree (SLD); 3.5 - 4.4 = Slightly agree (SLA); 4.5 – 5.4 = Agree (A),

5.5 – 6 = Strongly agree (SA)

### Benefits of guidance and counselling to pupils

Table 3 indicates that the students agreed with the following as top benefits guidance and counselling offered in schools: GC helps pupils identify and accept their strengths and weaknesses ( $\bar{x} = 5.29, s=0.30$ ); GC relates educational programme to future success ( $\bar{x} = 5.23, s=0.84$ ); GC develops decision-making skills ( $\bar{x} = 5.12, s=0.31$ ); GC facilitates career exploration and development ( $\bar{x} = 5.11, s=0.52$ ); GC broadens knowledge of our changing world ( $\bar{x} = 4.71, s=0.97$ ); guidance and counselling prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century through academic, career, and personal/social development ( $\bar{x} = 4.69, s=0.34$ ); GC enhances personal development ( $\bar{x} = 4.63, s=0.81$ ); GC provides advocacy for students ( $\bar{x} = 4.56, s=0.92$ ); GC help pupils develop effective study skills ( $\bar{x} = 4.54, s=0.35$ ); GC assists in acquiring knowledge of self and others ( $\bar{x} = 4.55, s=0.95$ ); GC assists in developing effective interpersonal relationship skills ( $\bar{x} = 4.53, s=0.40$ ).

The findings indicate that pupils recognize the significant value of guidance and counselling (GC) in preparing them to navigate the complex demands of the 21st century. They view GC as instrumental in providing academic support, facilitating career planning, and promoting personal and social development. Pupils consistently highlighted the role of GC in career exploration and in helping them connect their educational experiences to future aspirations—an insight that aligns with Taylor and Buku (2006), who emphasize the importance of students understanding job requirements and available opportunities. Moreover, the role of counselling in addressing emotional and personal challenges further underscores its holistic impact, as noted by Sharma (2006). These perspectives are reinforced by Lapan et al. (1997), who found that effective GC services contribute to improved academic performance and a more positive school climate. Similarly, Berry (2009) affirms that GC enhances students' awareness of both educational and vocational pathways, reinforcing its relevance in fostering well-rounded student development.



**Table 3:***Benefits of guidance and counselling to pupils.*

Item	$\bar{x}$	S	DE
GC help pupils identify and accept their strengths and weaknesses.	5.29	0.30	A
GC relate educational programme to future success.	5.23	0.84	A
GC develop decision-making skills	5.12	0.31	A
GC facilitate career exploration and development	5.11	0.52	A
GC broaden knowledge of our changing world.	4.71	0.97	A
GC prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century through academic, career and personal/social development	4.69	0.34	A
GC enhance personal development	4.63	0.81	A
GC provide advocacy for students	4.56	0.92	A
GC assist in acquiring knowledge of self and others	4.55	0.95	A
GC help pupils develop effective study skills	4.54	0.35	A
GC assist in developing effective interpersonal relationship skills	4.53	0.40	A
GC encourage facilitative, co-operative peer interactions.	4.23	0.41	SLA

**Legend:** Descriptive Equivalent (DE); 0-1.4 = Strongly disagree (SD); 1.5-2.4 = Disagree (D); 2.5- 3.4 = Slightly disagree (SLD); 3.5 - 4.4 = Slightly agree (SLA); 4.5 – 5.4 = Agree (A); 5.5 – 6 = Strongly agree (SA)

### **Comparison of pupils' perception regarding the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools by their demographic characteristics and background information**

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test were used to find out if there is a significant difference on the pupil's perception regarding the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools by their demographic characteristics and background information. Table 4 reveals that there is a significant difference on the pupils' perception regarding the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools by age ( $F=0.771$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Otherwise, there is no significant difference on the pupils' perception regarding the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools by sex ( $t= 0.258$ ,  $p=.63$ ) and years in current school ( $F= 1.187$ ,  $p=.30$ ). Further analysis using Tukey revealed that the respondents having 15 – 17 years held similar perceptions with those aged from 18 – 20 years. The perceptions from the two groups were different from those aged above 20 years.

Therefore, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference on the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and sex and the number of years spent in the school by the respondent and rejected the corresponding alternative hypothesis. However, the study accepted the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant

difference on the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services and age. The findings of the study are inconsistent with those by Mwangi (2002) who reported that the students' perceptions of guidance and counselling programme was affected not by pupils' age. However, the findings are consistent as gender was reported to be insignificant in determining the perceptions of students towards guidance and counselling services.

**Table 4:**

*Comparison of pupils' perception regarding the guidance and counselling services offered in their schools by their demographic characteristics and background information*

Variables	n	$\bar{x}$	S	value	p
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	52	4.47	0.56	t=0.258	0.63
Female	89	4.44	0.61		
<b>Age</b>					
15-17 years	24	4.46	0.59	F=0.771	0.00
18-20 years	77	4.32	0.57		
21 years and above	40	4.70	0.55		
<b>Years in current school</b>					
1 – 2 years	28	4.44	0.56	F=1.187	0.30
3 – 5 years	99	4.42	0.61		
6 and above	14	4.68	0.52		

Alpha level -  $p \leq 0.05$

### Strategies to improve guidance and counselling services in schools.

Table 5 indicates that the following were top most strategies to improve guidance and counselling services in schools: Host speech and prize giving functions to motivate pupils ( $\bar{x} = 5.33$ ,  $s=0.76$ ); Pupils must have debates on topics related to GC ( $\bar{x} = 4.55$ ,  $s=1.31$ ); Be open to all pupils and willing to help solve personal issues affecting pupils ( $\bar{x} = 4.95$ ,  $s=1.13$ ); GC services to assure students of the confidentiality of these guidance and counselling sessions ( $\bar{x} = 4.74$ ,  $s=0.99$ ).

The pupils further agreed that they must be well oriented about these guidance and counselling services upon arrival to schools ( $\bar{x} = 4.53$ ,  $s=1.21$ ); Pupils must do peer teaching to their friends and discuss about GC. ( $\bar{x} = 4.56$ ,  $s=1.35$ ); Pupils be assessed on information learnt from GC ( $\bar{x} = 4.42$ ,  $s=1.23$ ); Teachers be trained every year on GC ( $\bar{x} = 4.72$ ,  $s=1.44$ ); Teachers must pupils on issues even if they are not councillors ( $\bar{x} = 4.49$ ,  $s=1.33$ ); Give small talks even when conducting the assembly ( $\bar{x} = 4.67$ ,  $s=1.31$ ); Include both female and male counsellors ( $\bar{x} = 5.42$ ,  $s=1.34$ ); Teach more topics on how to cope with Covid 19 ( $\bar{x} = 4.96$ ,  $s=1.11$ ); Give simple assessment questions and incentives on GC topics done ( $\bar{x} = 4.41$ ,  $s=1.23$ ); Welcome all pupils equally without any bad attitude ( $\bar{x} = 4.99$ ,  $s=1.71$ ); Guidance and counselling services to provide incentives to encourage student interest ( $\bar{x} = 4.54$ ,  $s=1.12$ ); Allocate a fee for GC services in the budget so as to buy things like sanitary pads ( $\bar{x} = 4.49$ ,  $s=1.50$ ); Have GC day once a year and invite different speakers ( $\bar{x} = 4.84$ ,  $s=1.47$ ); Provide all first aid kit contents ( $\bar{x} = 4.87$ ,  $s=1.35$ ); Invite the ministry of health to our schools ( $\bar{x} = 4.87$ ,  $s=1.31$ ); Provide more resources to GC teachers ( $\bar{x} = 4.70$ ,  $s=1.33$ ); Parents to be well oriented about the benefits of guidance and counselling services offered to students ( $\bar{x} = 4.60$ ,  $s=1.12$ ); Parents give talks to pupils as well when they get home ( $\bar{x} = 4.56$ ,  $s=1.17$ ); Allow us to join clubs and give us time to go and mingle with our peers ( $\bar{x} = 4.50$ ,  $s=1.41$ ); Churches must have lessons and programmes for Sunday school, youth ( $\bar{x} = 4.89$ ,  $s=1.15$ ); Private organisations such as Young Heroes must offer financial services ( $\bar{x} = 4.89$ ,  $s=1.16$ ); The Government through The Ministry



of Education can take guidance and counselling service more serious ( $\bar{x} = 4.87, s=1.05$ ); The University of Eswatini Can have more researches on GC on how to continually improve it ( $\bar{x} = 4.84, s=1.14$ ); Community leaders must ask speakers to teach pupils during weekends ( $\bar{x} = 4.79, s=1.26$ ); Chiefdoms (*Imiphakatsi*) can also take the initiative and call the youth to give talks ( $\bar{x} = 4.59, s=1.35$ )

The findings also reveal that pupils recommend each school should have a dedicated venue or office for guidance and counselling services, where discussions can be held in a private and supportive environment. Pupils suggested that a classroom could be attached to this office so that, during the designated guidance and counselling (GC) periods, they could engage in discussions and become familiar with the services offered. They emphasized the need for a private room to serve as the counsellor's office, as some pupils are hesitant to visit the school counsellor when he or she is based in the staffroom. These findings align with Adeyemo (2014), who emphasizes that every school should allocate a dedicated room to be used as a counsellor's office. While guidance may be provided in various informal settings, Adeyemo (2014) asserts that effective counselling requires privacy. Adeyemo notes that although counsellors may attempt to meet with students in secluded areas such as corners of staffrooms or under trees, these spaces are not free from distractions. As a result, schools lacking a proper counselling office may only be able to offer educational or vocational guidance, rather than comprehensive socio-personal counselling.

The findings also indicate that the topics covered in guidance and counselling sessions should include information related to COVID-19. Pupils suggested that incorporating COVID-19-related topics would help them stay informed about the pandemic and its impact. Additionally, the findings highlight the need for more student-led activities such as clubs, debates, and presentations related to guidance and counselling. Pupils strongly agreed that debates on GC-related topics should be encouraged, both within their schools and in inter-school settings. They proposed that winning participants in these debates be rewarded with incentives, such as gifts, to increase motivation and participation. According to the pupils, such debates could serve an educational purpose for all students and raise awareness on important issues such as hygiene, environmental health, sexual health, and teenage pregnancy. Moreover, pupils recommended that GC-related presentations be integrated into morning assemblies and that peer teaching be promoted. Through peer-led discussions, pupils could engage one another on relevant GC topics such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and other issues that directly affect their lives.

**Table 5:**

*Strategies to improve guidance and counselling services in schools.*

<b>Descriptive statistics</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>S</b>	<b>DE</b>
Host speech and prize giving functions to motivate pupils	5.33	0.76	A
GC help pupils identify and accept their strengths and weaknesses.	5.29	1.36	A
GC relate educational programme to future success.	5.23	1.34	A
GC develop decision-making skills	5.12	0.97	A
GC facilitate career exploration and development.	5.11	0.99	A
Be consistent with attending all the GC periods	5.09	1.47	A
Welcome all pupils equally without any bad attitude	4.99	1.71	A
Teach more topics on how to cope with Covid 19	4.96	1.11	A

Be open to all pupils and willing to help solve personal issues affecting pupils	4.95	1.13	A
Churches must have lessons and programmes for Sunday school, youth	4.89	1.15	A
Private organisations such as Young Heroes must offer financial services	4.89	1.16	A
Invite the Ministry of Health to our schools	4.87	1.31	A
Be consistent with attending all the GC periods	5.09	1.47	A
Welcome all pupils equally without any bad attitude	4.99	1.71	A
Teach more topics on how to cope with Covid 19	4.96	1.11	A
Be open to all pupils and willing to help solve personal issues affecting pupils	4.95	1.13	A
Churches must have lessons and programmes for Sunday school, youth	4.89	1.15	A
Private organisations such as Young Heroes must offer financial services	4.89	1.16	A
Invite various speakers to schools to give talks on different topics	4.87	1.12	A
Government through the Ministry of Education and Training can take guidance and counselling services more seriously	4.87	1.05	A
Provide all first aid kit contents	4.87	1.35	A
Have a GC day once a year and invite different speakers	4.84	1.47	A
The University of Eswatini can have more research on GC on how to continually improve it	4.84	1.14	A
Community leaders must ask speakers to teach pupils during weekends	4.79	1.26	A
Include both female and male counsellors	4.78	1.34	A
Guidance and counseling services to assure students of the confidentiality of these guidance and counselling sessions	4.74	0.99	A
Teachers trained every year on GC	4.72	1.44	A
GC broadens knowledge of our changing world.	4.71	0.89	A
provide more resources to GC teachers	4.70	1.33	A
Prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century through academic, career, and personal/social development.	4.69	1.20	A
Give small talk even when conducting the assembly	4.67	1.31	A
Guidance and counselling enhance personal development	4.63	1.13	A
Incorporate more activities such as drama and role play during GC class	4.62	1.26	A
Parents to be well oriented towards the benefits of guidance and counseling services offered to students	4.60	1.18	A
Imiphakatsi can also take the initiative and call the youth to give talks	4.59	1.35	A
Pupils must do peer teaching to their friends and discuss GC.	4.56	1.35	A
GC provides advocacy for students	4.56	4.45	A
Give us talks as well when we get home	4.56	1.17	A

GC assists in acquiring knowledge of self and others	4.55	1.07	A
Pupils must have debates on topics related to GC	4.55	1.31	A
Guidance and counseling services to provide incentives to encourage student interest	4.54	1.12	A
GC helps pupils develop effective study skills	4.54	1.13	A
Allow us to join clubs and give us time to go and mingle with our peers	4.50	1.41	A
Allocate a fee for GC services in the budget to buy things like sanitary pads.	4.49	1.50	SLA
Teach pupils on issues even if they are not councilors	4.49	1.33	SLA
Schools to involve parents in provision of services	4.47	1.28	SLA
Pupils be assessed on information learnt from GC	4.42	1.23	SLA
GC services to incorporate ideas shared during brainstorming sessions with students	4.42	1.13	SLA
Give simple assessment questions an incentive on GC topics done	4.41	1.23	SLA
GC encourages facilitative, co-operative peer interactions.	4.23	1.31	SLA
Guidance and counseling services office to publish end of years results which are proof of effective study skills and guidance	4.22	1.27	SLA
Present for few minutes at the assembly in turns everyday	4.11	1.59	SLA
Guidance and counseling services to have informal conversations with students i.e. small chats outside the office	4.06	1.43	SLA

### Conclusions and recommendations

The study concludes that effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in Eswatini's secondary schools is vital for supporting students' academic and personal development. However, challenges such as limited student awareness, inadequate counsellor training, insufficient resources, and lack of dedicated counselling time hinder the effectiveness of these services. Furthermore, the absence of strong supervisory support and weak teacher-student relationships negatively affect the delivery of counselling services. To address these gaps, there is a need for comprehensive efforts by the Ministry of Education and Training, school leadership, teachers, and parents to enhance the guidance and counselling framework. By increasing sensitization, providing continuous professional development, fostering supportive environments, encouraging peer counselling, and strengthening supervision, schools can better meet the emotional and social needs of their students, ultimately promoting healthier, more communicative, and resilient school communities.

Based on the findings and conclusion from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. All secondary schools should have a dedicated, private, and adequately furnished counselling office to provide a confidential and comfortable environment where students can freely discuss their concerns, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services. This initiative will also support counsellors in delivering professional and uninterrupted sessions, fostering a culture of trust and openness within schools.
2. The Ministry of Education and Training of Eswatini through teacher counsellors should enlighten students on the importance of the guidance and counselling programme and the different services that are offered.

3. The Ministry of Education and Training should offer more counselling seminars to guidance and counselling teachers to empower and update them on the counselling strategies. Furthermore, the Ministry should provide guidance and counselling materials to schools.
4. The Ministry of Education and Training should introduce guidance and counselling friendly environment that creates time for organised counselling in schools to minimise the work-load on the teachers.
5. Students should be assisted by teachers and parents develop positive attitude towards guidance and counselling by encouraging them take an active role in peer counselling.
6. Teacher-counsellors should establish peer counselling groups within their schools to foster student confidence and encourage open communication. Such groups can provide a supportive environment where students feel more comfortable sharing their problems with peers.
7. Secondary school principals should actively uphold their supervisory role in the implementation of government policies, including the oversight of guidance and counselling programmes. Effective supervision will encourage teacher-counsellors to take their responsibilities more seriously and carry out their duties more effectively.
8. The Ministry of Education and Training should prioritize sensitizing all teachers on the importance of fostering positive relationships with students, as this encourages open communication and enables early intervention before student concerns escalate into serious issues.

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### Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper or otherwise.

### Authors' contributions

**Dlamini Phetsile:** Conception/design, development of data collection instrument, analysis, interpretation of data, revised manuscript (40%)

**Mpofu Molyn:** Conception/design, editing and first draft (20%)

**Tsikati Alfred:** Analysis and Interpretation of data analysis, interpretation of data, revised manuscript (40%)

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