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Barriers to Effective Guidance and Counselling Services for Secondary School Students with Visual Impairment in Tanzania

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Abstract

This article explores the barriers to effective provision of guidance and counselling services for students with visual impairment (SwVI) in government secondary schools in Tanzania. It hinges on the social model of disability, qualitative phenomenological design and data from both primary and secondary sources to investigate the lived experiences of students. While acknowledging the contribution of existing studies to our understanding of the subject matter, it focuses on students with visual impairment in secondary schools because they have received relatively less attention. Concomitantly, the article extends the application of the social model of disability to the domain of school-based guidance and counselling, highlighting how institutional neglect and structural barriers extend social exclusion. The findings reveal conspicuous and persistent barriers that provide a more formidable challenge to inclusive and effective guidance and counselling services. The study calls for policy reforms, the development of inclusive counselling guidelines, professional capacity building, and targeted resource allocation to create a more equitable and supportive educational environment for learners with visual impairments.

Keywords: Barriers, Guidance and Counselling, Students with Visual Impairment, Government Secondary School

Introduction

Students with visual impairment (SwVI) have experienced systemic marginalization within school-based psychosocial support structures across time and space despite global advancements in inclusive education. Indeed, marginalization has been evident in the domain of guidance and counselling services, which, albeit prominent, sidelines the need for the provision of holistic and inclusive education (Dhal, 2020). In the end, guidance and counselling reinforce a better understanding of students and effective solutions to problems and help them cope with learning and teaching environments (Dhal, 2020; Parveen & Akhtar, 2023). Existing scholarship has demonstrated the centrality of guidance and counselling services in moulding students' well-being and holistic development, including educational, vocational, social and

emotional development. They are requisite for students' self-awareness and ability to solve their own problems and adjust to their social, emotional and personal development (Amat, 2018; Dhal, 2020).

Studies have demonstrated that SwVI encompasses learners with difficulties in visual acuity, including learners with low vision or total blindness (Kisanga & Kisanga, 2020; Pandey, 2018). Students with these challenges seemingly encounter a range of difficulties in reconciling their new selves with their former nondisabled identity, recurrent experiences of abuse and discrimination from sighted peers, and difficulties in orientation and mobility. They are also subjected to systemic barriers, including but not limited to non-acceptance, discrimination, ridicule, bullying and stereotyping. The stigma engrained in society and the learning environment has resulted in increased frustration, anxiety and depression among students with special needs and who are virtually impaired (Barr et al., 2012; Kahveci, 2016). Studies have shown that increased frustrations and anxieties have led to poor academic performance and a loss of interest in schooling (Kahveci, 2016), exacerbating numerous psychosocial problems. Amid increased stress and psychological dilemmas, guidance and counselling services become imperative in navigating through the gamut of psychological challenges and emotional shocks among students (Mullins, 2019).

While remedying these problems has become an uphill task, Bakar et al. (2019) believe that the current guidance and counselling services in most government school settings hinge on a "one-size-fits-all" philosophy, nudging aside specific guidance and counselling needs of virtually impaired students. Studies further show that counselling professionals in government schools are constrained by proper training or knowledge on specific guidance and counselling that is indispensable for accommodating the specific needs of the virtually impaired. We learn, for example, from Sakiz et al. (2017) that, SwVI in government secondary schools are less served by counselling professionals. These challenges stem from a lack of training and knowledge in providing guidance and counselling services and inadequate guidance and counselling services.

This paper contributes to the existing knowledge by revealing the systemic, institutional, structural, procedural and professional barriers that hinder the provision of effective guidance and counselling services to the SwVI, thereby calling for tailored counselling approaches and practices that address the unique needs and challenges of SwVI in government secondary schools in Tanzania. In other words, this study addresses the conceptual gap regarding the under-researched challenges that constrain the effective provision of counselling services to SwVI in secondary education. Theoretically, it contributes to the utilization of the social model of disability to reveal the challenges or barriers of inclusive counselling for SwVI at the secondary level of education. The paper also informs policy and practice changes that promote more inclusive and accessible guidance and counselling services for SwVI in educational settings. Significantly, the results of this study inform training programs for counsellors to ensure that they are equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes that effectively support SwVI. For example, knowledge of disability awareness, accessibility and adapted counselling skills and techniques. Furthermore, the paper highlights the importance of creating or adapting inclusive counselling environments that are accessible for SwVI in government secondary schools. Finally, the paper contributes to promoting inclusive education as a broader goal by

highlighting the importance of accessible guidance and counselling services in supporting the academic and personal success of SwVI in government secondary schools in Tanzania.

Literature Review

Studies about guidance and counselling abound. However, an attempt into which they are linked to visually impaired students, particularly to government schools, remains desirable in the literature. For Kahveci (2016), counselling professionals have had historically limited contact with the population of individuals with disabilities, ranging from a lack of confidence and training to an inability to handle clients with disabilities, making it a herculean task to provide requisite services to the needy. Kahveci (2016) further reported that most counsellors believe that counsellors' skills are less important to virtually impaired students because services of this type are for children with disabilities. This notion, however, was built on false premises. The work of Usang (2021), Mullins (2019) and Sakiz et al. (2017) challenges the widely held notion among counsellors to argue that effective counselling professionals should have specialized guidance and counselling skills for attending students with visual impairment.

According to Kahveci (2016), professional competences are vital in counsellor educational programs and are requisite for the development and provision of services to students with disabilities such as SwVI. This view is shared by Lorikiriki (2016) in Kenya, who argues that while teacher counsellors offer guidance and counselling services to learners with visual impairment, their efforts are hampered by an unfriendly unconducive environment to foster proper integration. In contrast, Susandra et al. (2020), who focused their analyses on the qualifications of Indonesian counsellor educators, revealed that while the majority of counsellors demonstrated adequate academic competences, professional competences were glaringly missing.

In Turkey, Sakiz et al. (2017) studied counselling skills from the perspective of counsellors with visual impairment to examine the varied responses of clients (both visually impaired and sighted) and the necessary skills to work with diverse clients. A study by Lorikiriki (2016) reported that a conducive environment is among the key factors for promoting effective guidance and counselling programmes in government schools. In Malaysia, Amin et al. (2021), employing a case study design, identified several challenges encountered by SwVI, including financial glitches, social stigma, accessibility, peer acceptance and difficulties in learning. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2024) highlighted problems in the field, including a lack of specialized training, limited access to resources and assistive technologies, to mention just a few

In Tanzania, Mgumba (2018) noted the extent to which counsellors with general counselling skills and knowledge lacked a specific guiding policy and guidelines for attending the SwVI. Although counsellors had inadequate counselling professionalism in counselling persons with disabilities, they employed counselling knowledge derived from other diplomas, degrees and undergraduate programmes where counselling was taught only as a course or a module. Furthermore, the study by Rushahu (2017) demonstrated a conspicuous lack of adequate training in the skills of handling students with disabilities and that the lack of a national policy for guidance and counselling provides a more formidable challenge to rendering services to students with disabilities. Similarly, Ndumbaro (2020), who explored the status of guidance and counselling for students with disabilities, reported a lack of in-service training and mistrust of teacher counsellors, accessibility of the school environment, and stigmatization of SwVI.

Kija and Mgumba (2024) further showed how barriers to the effective provision of counselling and guidance services led SwVI to succumb to anxiety, fear, poor self-confidence, aggressiveness and frustration, loneliness, stress and denial, which together need specialized guidance and counselling services to rehabilitate their psychological well-being. Other studies that have examined the challenges of effective guidance and counselling include those of Kachweka and Rupia (2022) and Wilson (2016).

A perusal from the literature review suggests that there has been a lack of understanding of the barriers to the effective provision of guidance and counselling services in government secondary schools. A review of the literature demonstrates that existing studies converge in identifying the challenges of inclusive education, citing numerous challenges. By and large, the problems that are prominent in the literature are related to academic challenges and are not linked to guidance and counselling services to SwVI.

In Tanzania, the literature on guidance and counselling in secondary education focuses on the generally sighted student population, nudging aside students with disabilities such as SwVI (Nkuba & Kyaruzi, 2015; Sima, 2018; Frank, 2019; Lyimo et al., 2024). The literature further sidesteps other domains that are equally important. A few other studies on students with disabilities (Mgumba, 2021; Rushahu, 2017) have focused on counselling services in higher education institutions, whereas others (Wilson 2016; Kachweka7 Rupia) draw examples from primary schools but are not related to guidance and counselling services. Although Ndumbaro (2020) focused on students with disabilities in general, SwVI remains desirable from his analysis and arguments. By and large, a review of the literature on the subject matter in Tanzania reveals a glaring neglect of SwVI and barriers to the effective provision of guidance and counselling services. This study, therefore, attempts to fill that void.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the social model of disability by Mike Oliver in 1983. The theory is premised on the assumption that people are incapacitated by numerous societal barriers. This view suggests that disability is a socially constructed phenomenon, as it challenges the widely held notion of disability as a moral continuum and calls for structural and attitudinal barriers. As such, it empowers people with disabilities to defy accepted norms in society and the educational realm through guidance and counselling services (Union of Physically Impaired against Segregation [UPIAS], 1976). As the model attests, societal systems often fail to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, reinforcing the exclusion of meaningful psychosocial support services in mainstream social activities (Shakespeare, 2010; SPECTRUM, 2018). For decades of production of knowledge and guidance and counselling services, the model has proven to be a practical tool for identifying the systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion engrained in society (Shakespeare, 2010). This paper uses the social model of disability as an analytic category to examine the systemic, institutional, professional, societal and environmental constraints in the provision of guidance and counselling services to the SwVI in government secondary schools (Shakespeare, 2010; SPECTRUM, 2018).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders involved in the provision of guidance and

counselling services to SwVI in government secondary schools (Denzin et al., 2024; Maphie, 2023). As an inclusive approach, a phenomenological research design captures divergent participants' perspectives on institutional, professional and systemic factors influencing the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services to SwVI in government secondary schools (Denzin et al., 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, the researchers in this study described and interpreted diverse and contextual aspects of barriers affecting the effective provision of guidance and counselling services to SwVI (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The study was conducted in Ubungo Municipality, Dar es Salaam region, Tanzania. Data from the Basic Education Statistics (BEST) of 2019--2021 show that compared with other regions, Dar es Salaam has the highest degree of SwVI among government secondary schools, making it imperative for the subject matter (MoEST, 2019; PO-LARG, 2020; MoEST, 2021).

The study relied on 28 participants who were purposively selected from four government secondary schools, five teacher counsellors, four school heads and nineteen SwVI. These participants were selected on the basis of their experience in the provision of guidance and counselling services. The researchers engaged SwVI in both interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), whereas teacher counsellors and school heads participated in in-depth interviews (MoEST, 2021). The selected sample was effective in two ways. First, it allows researchers to reach data saturation to meet the study objective and to exhaust information from informants (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, the sample size corresponded to the range of 15–30 participants suggested in existing studies for interview-based qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kisanga, 2017; Mason, 2010). This range of interviewees provides glimpses into the patterns of the subject matter in comparison to the large sample size, which cannot yield new information. In this context, the choice of the 15--30 range informants became ideal for this study.

The researchers employed multiple data collection methods, namely, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and documentary reviews, to increase the degree of credible and in-depth findings (Mik-Meyer, 2020) and conducted interviews with teacher counsellors, heads of school and SwVIs. The researchers held all the interviews and FGDs in the Kiswahili language. They were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Indeed, interviews inspired participants' expression of nuanced perspectives on the subject matter and provided research with an avenue to probe emerging issues and clarify ambiguities arising from research questions (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mik-Meyer, 2020). In addition to interviews, researchers relied on three focus group discussions to explore shared experiences among participants on the subject matter. Two groups consisted of six participants, while one group consisted of seven participants. The method brought together the SwVI, facilitating their interaction and thus capturing their diverse views, insights and experiences related to the research topic (Silverman, 2020). With respect to documentary review, researchers have thoroughly reviewed school documents such as guidance and counselling logbooks, guidelines and school reports to triangulate data and assess the school environment for guidance and counselling services (Bowen, 2009; Rice & Thornton, 2019).

The researchers documented data obtained through interviews and FGDs through a digital recording device. Researchers effectively transcribed the collected data through listening to the recorded audio sounds and writing the verbatim words, sounds and gestures observed.

Researchers then subjected the obtained data to thematic analysis to examine converging and divergent themes. In particular, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis, which involved becoming familiar with the data and proceeded to generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the final analysis report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The entire analytic procedure was aided by the MAXQDA version 10 software program. This procedure is imperative for enabling researchers to systematically identify, organize and offer insight into patterns of meaning across datasets from participants (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). It involves finding, selecting, appraising and synthesizing data contained in the documents (Bowen, 2009; Rice & Thornton, 2019).

To ensure the anonymity of the informants consulted during fieldwork, researchers adopted pseudocodes composed of a combination of letters and numbers for all participants and schools instead of actual names. Accordingly, the researcher used IDIS1 to IDIS19 as the cognate of SwVI, who participated in in-depth interviews, and FGDS1 to FGDS19 for SwVI, who participated in FGDs. Similarly, researchers employed pseudocodes ranging from IDITC1 to IDITC5 for teacher counsellors who participated in in-depth interviews and IDIHoS1 to IDI HoS4 for heads of school. The four government schools were represented by SCH1 to SCH4.

The researchers sought research permits from the University of Dar es Salaam through its Research Information Management System (RIMS) and from the Regional Administrative Secretary, District Administrative Secretary, and District Education Officers for all research sites and from each head of school. In carrying out research, researchers have observed ethical considerations such as principles of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, justice, respect, free participation, non-malevolence and beneficence for participants (Mirza et al., 2023; Bos, 2020).

Barriers to Effective Provision of Guidance and Counselling Services

This study, centring on the social model of disability, examines barriers to the effective provision of guidance and counselling services to identify the government, policy makers on the gravity of the problem and coping mechanisms (Bakar et al., 2019; Dhal, 2020). This section provides readers with glimpses into the barriers to effective guidance and counselling services in selected Tanzanian government schools.

Availability of Specific Guidelines for Students with Special Needs

The results from interviews with teacher counsellors revealed a conspicuous absence of specific guidelines for guidance and counselling for students with special needs. None of the five teacher counsellors reported having the specific guidelines for students with special needs, nor did they have the guidelines for general counselling. They rely solely on their own knowledge and experience acquired at universities or colleges, where guidance and counselling are taught as a part of the course or module. They also drew on their personal experiences as adults and parents (IDITC5SCH4).

Similarly, it was confirmed by one of the heads of school acknowledging that he had not received guidelines for guidance and counselling targeting special needs. Instead, the informant emphasized that "we only receive promises from the government" (IDIHoS2SCH2). It is,

therefore, important that guidelines be made available to help counsellors and heads of schools discharge the services bestowed upon them to SwVI in inclusive schools.

The statements from IDITC5SCH4 and IDIHoS2SCH2 suggest a lack of both general and specific guidelines for guidance and counselling services among teacher counsellors, representing a significant barrier in the respective government secondary schools. In particular, the absence of specific guidelines for students with special needs involving SwVI shows that this is especially critical. This is attributable to the fact that the government, through MoEST, overlooked this need when preparing the general guidelines, assuming that the general guidelines would sufficiently accommodate students with special needs or that experts with special needs were not involved.

Similarly, a perusal of the current guidelines for student formation, counselling and child protection of 2020 by the MoEST reveals a noticeable absence of issues related to inclusivity. For instance, the specific counselling skills and training for attending SwVI, facilities and resources need ethical consideration, indicating a significant barrier in enhancing inclusive guidance and counselling services for SwVI in government secondary schools. The presence of such a caveat in the current guidelines suggests that the current guidelines are tailored to benefit more the general population of students than students with special needs, notably SwVI.

The lack of specific guidelines for SwVI appears to be inconsistent with the provisions of the social model of disability (Shakespeare, 2010). These binaries provide a more formidable challenge to SwVI in receiving tailored and quality psychosocial support services on equal footing with other sighted peers. This suggests the exclusion of the ability of SwVI to enjoy and participate fully in inclusive education, as teacher counsellors may struggle to adapt and provide adequate support to meet the unique needs of the SwVI, thereby perpetuating barriers to learning and participation. The results of this study support the assertion of Mgumba (2021) that problems facing students with special needs, such as SwVI, cannot be handled by general counselling alone. Instead, specialized counselling with specific guidelines for counsellors should be prioritized to inculcate them with the requisite skills on guidance and counselling to students with special needs. This suggestion resonates well with the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) (2023) guidelines and UDSM (2020) policy on disability and special educational needs, which emphasize the provision of tailored professional guidance and counselling services to students with special needs such as SwVI with appropriate guidelines.

The availability of specific guidelines targeting SwVI is acknowledged as being effective in guiding and informing counselling practitioners in providing specialized services to meet the specific needs of clients. The guidelines serve as a reference document for informing and providing counsellors with knowledge, skills, techniques and understanding of the nature of the clients they attend and the nature of their perceived problems. Additionally, the specific guidelines inform counsellors on the inclusive facilities and resources needed to execute their roles effectively with the best outcomes (NCERT, 2015; UDSM, 2023; Yuwono et al., 2017). In contrast, the absence of such guidelines can result in unprofessional guidance and counselling services that fail to adequately address the disability conditions and specific needs of these students. By failing to fully comprehend their unique needs, counsellors struggle to provide effective inclusive counselling services to SwVI. Consequently, inequalities in inclusive education are perpetuated. Nevertheless, the absence contradicts the provisions of the social model of disability and UNCRPD (Shakespeare, 2010; SPECTRUM, 2018; UN, 2006).

However, as in Usang (2021), these weaknesses could lead to guidance and counselling services being provided reactively rather than proactively by counselling professionals. In this context, there is a pressing need to reassess the inclusiveness of the current guidelines developed by the government through the MoEST within the Tanzania education curriculum to increase the effectiveness of counselling practitioners in government secondary schools.

Availability of Standalone Professional Counsellors

The findings from the interviews and FGDs reveal a shortage of standalone professional counsellors to serve the SwVI in government secondary schools. This professional barrier was evident when researchers asked SwVI, where they sought help that needed guidance and counselling. Mixed views emerged in response to this question, whereas some responded that they had never seen any standalone counsellor, resorting to seeking help from class-teachers or discipline masters. Some resorted to seeking help to someone they trusted. A common response among them was that we are "Walimu wa malezi" (formation teachers), "patron" or "matron" and not school counsellors (IDIS2SCHA). One student, in response to the question, stated that "Each student goes to someone whom they trust to seek help. We need someone we can confide in besides teachers because we fear that some of them may have bad intentions or try to seduce us" (FGD1S5SCH3).

In a similar vein, teacher counsellors supported the students' concerns, claiming that they were professionally trained and comfortable with being teachers and not school counsellors. They argued against the government's assumption that "the government assumes that all teachers are psychologists and therefore can provide guidance and counselling services" to show that it was not a practical reality. Instead, the "counselling profession requires specialized expertise, just like the teaching profession does" (IDITC5SCH4).

Accounts from IDIS2SCHA and FGD1S5SCH3 elucidate the critical need for standalone professional counsellors in government secondary schools. As reflected in the students' expressions, referring to teacher counsellors as formation teachers—Walimu wa malezi—undermined their recognition as actual school counsellors. This finding indicates that the title "teacher counsellor" was confusing to the students, which may explain why some reported never having seen or even heard of a school counsellor at their school. Furthermore, the fear and lack of trust in male teacher counsellors signal that SwVI is suspected to be unprofessional conduct in the respective schools. Similarly, the IDITC5SCH4's challenge to the assumption that "all teachers are psychologists and can offer guidance and counselling" reflects an awareness among teacher counsellors that they are cognizant of the importance of professionalism and competence as the heart of excellence in the workplace. This explains why they advocated that counselling professionals assume that role for efficient and effective outcomes. These concerns from SwVI and teacher counsellors are well supported by Usang (2021), who shows that most secondary schools have limited professional counsellors with adequate knowledge and skills to attend to students with special needs. This barrier results in inadequate provision of guidance and counselling services to needy students.

Similarly, the findings correspond to those of Amat (2018), Mgumba (2021), Rushahu (2017) and Sakiz et al. (2017), who reported that professionalism in school guidance and counselling is a critical component that needs to be prioritized for effective and inclusive teaching and learning. For Amat, Mgumba and Rushahu, the availability of professional counsellors is

important in reinforcing the level of trust and recognition among students (clients) at school. The opposite risks and undermines the integrity of the counselling profession, exacerbating the exclusion of SwVI in receiving adequate and tailored services to meet their unique needs. Consequently, the excellence of SwVI affects their academic pursuits and emotional growth. It also contravenes the Salamanca statement and framework for action (UNESCO, 1994) and the Dakar framework for action (UNESCO, 2000), which emphasize the recruitment of professional personnel, in this sense standalone professional and specialized counsellors, to enhance inclusivity in education and to enhance the status, morale and professionalism among counsellors in inclusive school settings. This underscores the importance of having dedicated standalone professional counsellors to build trust, ensure ethical practice and enhance recognition of counselling services among students in government secondary schools to align with the ideals of the social model of disability.

Training and Qualifications of Teacher Counsellors

In-depth interviews with teacher counsellors revealed that, none of them had received any formal training in specific counselling, not even general counselling, or were certified to become professional counsellors. They further elaborated that the content of the seminars and workshops did not incorporate aspects of disability or special needs. Two counsellors among the five reported using knowledge acquired from the university and college, where they studied general guidance and counselling as a course of their degree programme. All the teacher counsellors admitted to having used their own knowledge, experience, updated guidance and counselling skills from personal efforts and little knowledge they gained by attending some seminars and workshops organized by the government at the municipal level (IDITC3SCH2).

The lack of proper training on guidance and counselling services suggests that proper training of teacher counsellors is a critical factor for effective service delivery not only to SwVI but also for students of all categories in the respective schools. This issue could be linked to the government's budget prioritization, which affects the availability of time and resources for counsellor training. Furthermore, the reliance on teacher counsellors' own experiences and limited university knowledge suggests a level of para-professionalism among teacher counsellors in the provision of guidance and counselling services in the respective schools. Moreover, the selection of a teacher counsellor who studies human resource management to perform the guidance and counselling roles questions the selection criteria for the counselling profession in schools—whether they are overlooked or no longer prioritized. Importantly, the lack of prior formal training confirms a lack of practical experience in handling students of diverse natures, notably SwVI. Furthermore, limitations in training suggest that the seminars and workshops organized by the government are not a panacea for developing full-fledged counselling professionals capable of serving clients of diverse needs; consequently, they remain para-professionals. The lack of theoretical orientation and practical experience implies that most teacher counsellors in government secondary schools are para-counsellors. These findings are indicative of the argument propounded by Usang (2021) about limited professional counsellors in secondary schools with adequate knowledge and skills to attend students with special needs. Similarly, Amat (2018), Sakiz et al. (2017), Mgumba (2021), and Rushahu (2017) call for counselling professionals to have systematic knowledge and skills through study, training and experience (on both general and specific counselling) to gain trust and recognition among students. Failure could compromise expertise and ethical considerations.

To cement the findings, researchers probed the qualifications of teacher counsellors to determine their level of education, experience and training. Fortunately, they all consented voluntarily to share their details on this aspect. The findings revealed that despite their varying practice experiences (raging from one to four years), none of the five interviewed teacher counsellors had received any formal training at any recognized institution on guidance and counselling to be certified. Moreover, four of them had B. A in Education, while one had B. A in human resource and management. This suggests that their education level, such as that of B. A in Education, was tailored for teaching purposes and not guidance and counselling practices. Furthermore, the B. A. in human resources and management from a female teacher counsellor at School B was neither suitable for teaching nor guidance and counselling activities. This implies that despite practicing guidance and counselling for one, two or three years, all the interviewed teacher counsellors were para-professionals. These findings correspond to those of Amat (2018), Sima (2018), Lyimo et al. (2024), and Nkuba and Kyaruzi (2015), whose studies indicated that most of the teacher counsellors in government schools were para-professionals and lacked formal training or certification in guidance and counselling. They also concur with those of Mgumba (2021), who reported that although counsellors possessed and applied general counselling skills to students, none held a certificate, a diploma or a degree specifically in counselling, particularly for students with disabilities. Similar findings were reported by Susandra et al. (2020), indicating that despite possessing academic competence, school counsellors lacked professional competence in terms of practical training and the necessary skills to handle clients effectively with diverse needs and conditions.

Studies by Nkuba and Kyaruzi (2015), Rushahu (2017), and Sakiz et al. (2017) underscore that the presence of untrained and unspecialized school counsellors on disability issues reduces the confidence of guidance and counselling services. Consequently, they have biased beliefs when they are attending clients such as SwVI. Furthermore, such a deficit makes school counsellors struggle to understand and provide tailored guidance and counselling services to meet the unique needs of SwVI. In other words, teacher counsellors fail to provide sufficient and specialized support to SwVI. This implies that SwVI experience social exclusion by not receiving tailored, adequate and specialized guidance and counselling services from trained counsellors that cater to their unique needs. They become isolated to participate and enjoy these essential services for their academic and psychological well-being. Additionally, such a deficit results in inadequate academic guidance, affecting students' ability to set goals, plan their academic paths and make informed decisions (Lyimo et al., 2024). In general, the lack of specialized training among teacher counsellors challenges the provisions of the Salamanca statement and framework for action (UNESCO, 1994) and the Sustainable Development Goals, goal4 (SDG4) (UNESCO, 2017), which together stress the training of educational personnel as key for sustainable, supportive and inclusive learning environments for students such as SwVI, thereby allowing them to thrive in their academic endeavours and personal growth.

Experiences from selected government schools show that teacher counsellors should undergo intensive training in recognized institutions. Trainings ranging from short- to long-term variations will equip them with the necessary inclusive and adapted practical skills and techniques to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. These findings demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that there is a glaring shortage of training and qualifications among teacher counsellors, which represents a more formidable challenge to the effective provision

of guidance and counselling services to students with special needs and the general population of students in government secondary schools.

The need for practical skills corresponds to the study by Sakiz et al. (2017), who argued that counsellors attending to clients with visual impairment should possess the necessary specific skills beyond their general skills (basic and communication skills). They include but are not limited to the use of more verbal interactions than non-verbal cues and provide information in accessible formats, while attending skills include having knowledge of coping skills, notably emotion-focused and problem-focused skills. Most elaborately, they must be well informed about the unique needs of the SwVI when handling it. Furthermore, UDSM (2023, section 7.4) highlights important considerations when counselling clients with visual impairments, citing visual aspects that clients can access information in accessible formats. Gazzola (2016) summarized these provisions, suggesting that competence among professional counsellors is demonstrated through three key aspects of performance, namely, a repertoire of specialized knowledge, skills, and attitudes, all of which are formalized through academic training and education and collectively lead to superior performance. It is therefore imperative to recognize that the training of teacher counsellors should be prioritized to address this gap in addressing the unique needs and conditions of students' issues effectively.

Merging of Guidance and Counselling with Non-counselling Roles

In exploring the roles performed by teacher counsellors, it was noted that teacher counsellors had multiple responsibilities, causing their primary duty of counselling to come to a standstill. These additional responsibilities included teaching, handling discipline issues, child protection, and administrative tasks. In addition, one counsellor explained that managing a large number of students in teaching made it difficult to fulfil counselling duties effectively, as one teacher remarked, "There are only two teacher counsellors here for approximately 1,829 students" and that "managing such a large number of students while handling teaching, counselling, student formation, and child protection" (IDITC5SCH4). Consequently, the majority of the teacher counsellors were exhausted and overwhelmed in their cognitive and psychological well-being, leaving them unfocused with low morale in their core counselling role.

The remark from IDITC5SCH5 provides insights into ways in which the range of activities entrusted to counsellors affects efficiency in executing their routine activities. These findings parallel those of Muhammed and Imam (2020), who investigated the impact of the dual role of teaching and professional counselling practices. They argued that juggling with multiple roles had an adverse effect on counsellors' efficient service delivery in the school system, leading to conflicting schedules, incompetency, confusion, loss of professional identity and less productivity. According to Muhammed and Imam (2020), appropriate school counselling duties generally fall into three categories: counselling, consultation and coordination. Other duties (roles), such as teaching, scheduling disciplinary functions, and clerical tasks, are inappropriate for counsellors to perform simultaneously. Similar findings were reported by other studies, such as those of Kabir (2017) and Nkuba and Kyaruzi (2015), who argued that the merging of counselling services with teaching and disciplinary matters among teacher counsellors contradicts the professional ethical principles of the counselling profession, notably autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity and adherence to confidentiality and privacy. Framed within the social model of disability, the explicated non-counselling roles performed by teacher counsellors reflect significant barriers to the efficient

and effective provision of guidance and counselling services to SwVI (Shakespeare, 2010), calling for their quick elimination. The merging of counselling roles with non-counselling duties among teacher counsellors was detrimental to their mental health and jeopardized the ethos of the counselling profession. It potentially excludes or deprives SwVI to receive specialized support and counselling services from teacher counsellors. Therefore, there is a pressing need to respect professional boundaries when guidance and counselling programs are implemented in these schools.

Availability of Facilities and Resources for Guidance and Counselling

This study revealed pertinent barriers affecting inclusive facilities and resources for guidance and counselling activities. Informants complained that they had not seen or accessed guidance and counselling books or other materials in accessible formats to inform them of these services. All five teacher counsellors and school heads consulted for the subject matter demonstrated a conspicuous lack of a standalone counselling unit in government-owned secondary schools. The complaint by one informant that "we have not accessed any book or any other materials about guidance and counselling materials in accessible format to inform us about these services" (FGDS6SCH1*)* highlights the gravity of the problem. Furthermore, allocated rooms for guidance and counselling rooms were only improvised by the school authority and were too small to cater to the needs of counselling; as one of the teacher counsellors remarked, "We don't have an ideal standalone counselling unit for guidance and counselling activities. As you can see, this office is very small and congested with many tables that we share with other teachers for teaching activities. It is also used for disciplinary matters" (IDITC2SCH2). Another teacher made it clear that "Although we are implementing guidance and counselling programs here, we are not financially facilitated to construct a standalone counselling unit with the needed inclusive facilities and resources. We rely on improvisation among the offices we have when allocating the guidance…" (IDIHOSCH4). These findings illustrate the urgency of providing guidance and counselling facilities and resources in government secondary schools. These findings parallel the findings of two studies by Kabir (2017) and Omede and Tenimu (2013), who reported deficiencies in counselling facilities and resources for clients with visual impairments. Other studies by Fareo and Omeche (2022) hold the similar view that a lack of appropriate guidance and counselling facilities and resources in Nigerian schools has resulted in poor attendance and low performance among students with special needs.

To illustrate the actual condition of the counselling environment, the researcher obtained consent from teacher counsellors to take representative photographs of the counselling room, as shown in Figure 1.1:



Source: Field Data (2023)

Figure 1.1 portrays the typical guidance and counselling environment in government secondary schools. Although the counselling room is labelled "guidance and counselling" at the door, it is not ideal for guidance and counselling sessions. Notably, it is shared by teacher counsellors, who are not spacious and who are cluttered with teaching materials rather than inclusive counselling resources in accessible formats. The rooms were rough and unfurnished and lacked essential storage facilities such as shelves. Computers and stationery were also missing. Significantly, the tables and chairs were poorly arranged, creating a hazardous environment for clients, particularly the SwVI. Such sitting arrangements put SwVI at risk of injury from bumping into the tables placed near the door. All these findings suggest that the improvised room was for teaching purposes and not guidance and counselling services. This affirms the claim of Mgumba (2021), who argued that unfavourable physical and counselling environments, coupled with poor conditions in counselling rooms (not user friendly), contributed to demotivating students such as SwVIs from going for counselling sessions. It also affirms what Pearson and Wilson (2012) revealed: an ugly counselling environment is likely to demotivate clients to seek guidance and counselling services. It can cause fatigue, headache, irritability and hostility among clients, such as those with SwVI, in government schools. They underscore that the counselling room (environment), as a workplace for

counsellors, plays a significant role in influencing the relationship between the counsellor and clients as well as the outcomes of the counselling sessions. This is because the counselling environment affects clients' physical and psychological well-being, helping them feel safe and welcomed. An ideal counselling room equipped with appropriate facilities and resources is often experienced by clients as a "healing space" that supports their emotional and even spiritual needs. Conversely, an unfriendly or poorly equipped counselling environment can discourage clients, such as those with SwVIs in government schools, from seeking guidance and counselling services. It may also contribute to fatigue, headaches, irritability, and hostility.

Similarly, the findings from the document review revealed a lack of ideal furniture, notably chairs for clients. The available chairs were reserved for the teacher counsellors themselves. The review also revealed, among other issues, the lack of adaptive information and communication materials, such as braille books, brochures, and journals; flipping charts in accessible formats; and a lack of information storage facilities, such as computers and shelves. Importantly, none of the teacher counsellors in the respective schools had stationery facilities such as printing materials for counselling activities. Importantly, the review revealed a lack of notice boards, suggestion boxes and therapeutic support facilities, such as music devices and resting places for clients. These findings are consistent with those of Kabir (2017), Mgumba (2021), Omede and Tenimu (2013), and Fareo and Omeche (2022), who reported similar barriers for both teacher counsellors and clients with visual problems. Similarly, Rushahu (2017) listed the scarcity of inclusive facilities and resources among the significant barriers to effective provision of guidance and counselling to students with disabilities, including SwVI. This scarcity could be attributed to a lack of specific budgets allocated to cater to guidance and counselling facilities and resources, school administration prioritization of these needs or the neglect of teacher counsellors themselves in alerting the relevant authorities for these needs.

The existence of barriers in facilities and resources for guidance and counselling activities in government secondary schools contravenes the ideals of the counselling profession. This reflects the perpetuation of barriers in inclusive education that exclude or disadvantage SwVI in accessing and participating fully in these inclusive services, thereby affecting their academic and emotional well-being. The social model of disability contradicts its core principle of removing barriers to promote the well-being of people with disabilities (Mullins, 2019; Shakespeare, 2010; SPECTRUM, 2018). It also violates the provisions of the Dakar framework for action (UNESCO, 2000) and the Salamanca statement for action (UNESCO, 1994), which advocate for the availability of inclusive facilities and resources to benefit students with special needs such as SwVI in educational settings. The availability, adequacy and condition of inclusive facilities and resources for guidance and counselling in government secondary schools are critical and alarming. Consequently, the effective implementation of guidance and counselling programs in the respective schools is risky. Therefore, this situation requires urgent and focused attention from the government in collaboration with school administrations and counselling professionals to develop strategies that address these challenges for improved outcomes.

Adherence to Ethical Considerations During Guidance and Counselling

During the interview, the teacher counsellors admitted that succumbing to an ethical dilemma resulted in non-adherence to ethical considerations in the guidance and counselling activities. They insisted that the dilemmas were caused by a lack of standalone counselling units, poorly

located counselling rooms, multiple roles performed by teacher counsellors and unreliable information storage facilities. Consequently, these issues undermined the ethos of the counselling profession, particularly regarding calmness, confidentiality and privacy; as one informant remarked, "The location of the counselling room is not ideal, with approximately 1,800 students here, the noise outside is considerable, making it difficult to hear each other during sessions. It is adjacent to other teachers' offices, so conversations with clients can easily be overheard. This situation compromises the privacy of the conversation, particularly when clients such as SwVI attend the counselling sessions." (IDITC5SCH4).

This expression from IDITC5SCH4 suggests that ethical considerations regarding the provision of guidance and counselling services were at stake in government secondary schools. These findings are congruent with those of Kabir (2017) and Ogwa (2021), who reported that the location of counselling rooms affects ethical considerations in guidance and counselling. Similarly, the findings resonate with those of Rushahu (2017), who reported a lack of a confidential atmosphere for guidance and counselling services and increased mistrust and disrespect resulting from ethical dilemmas. As noted by Kabir (2017), the counselling room for students should be located somewhere far from other people where privacy and confidentiality can be maintained. In this way, clients can feel comfortable and relaxed during counselling sessions.

Furthermore, the issue of counsellors' multiple roles affecting ethical adherence aligns with findings by Kabir (2017), Muhammed and Imam (2020), and Nkuba and Kyaruzi (2015), who argue in favour of the multiple roles of counsellors, such as teaching, discipline issues and clerical duties in government schools, and their impact on confidentiality and privacy. Similarly, Sibandze and Mfumbate (2019) reported that workload engagement affects ethical dilemmas in schools. Furthermore, the lack of reliable storage facilities for clients' information and record-keeping aligns with Our Lady of Lake University (OLLU) (2021) and the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia PACFA (2023), who indicated that school counsellors face challenges in maintaining proper records, thereby compromising confidentiality and privacy. Ogwa (2021) and OLLU (2021) emphasize that ethics are at the core of the guidance and counselling profession. They serve as the backbone for counsellors, guiding them to make decisions that prioritize the wellbeing of their clients. The lack of such services compromises or decreases clients' trust and deters them from seeking these noble services. In particular, the susceptibility to breaching confidentiality excludes SwVI from enjoying a secure and comfortable counselling environment. Notably, teacher counsellors, in collaboration with the school administration in government secondary schools, are expected to create an accessible counselling environment of trust and confidentiality to ensure that clients such as SwVI feel comfortable and relaxed during guidance and counselling sessions.

Budget for Facilitating Guidance and Counselling Activities

The interviews with teacher counsellors and heads of school revealed a scarcity of budget to facilitate guidance and counselling activities in the respective schools. Consequently, this situation hindered the proper functioning of guidance and counselling services as planned, including the procurement of necessary facilities and resources to meet the standards of the counselling profession. In addition, the lack of dedicated funding has strained their psychological and personal finances when performing their duties. For example, in most cases, they used their own money—out of pocket—especially when they visited students' families

for guidance and counselling-related matters. From a similar perspective, the heads of schools asserted, "We don't have a budget allocated to support our guidance and counselling activities. At times, we use our own personal funds to visit students' homes and speak with their parents" (IDITC4SCH3). These findings demonstrate that no specific budget was allocated for implementing the guidance and counselling programmes in the respective schools. They improvised and reallocated funds from the existing school budget.

The two remarks from the participants suggest that the effective implementation of the guidance and counselling programme in government secondary schools was hindered by the lack of a dedicated budget allocated to support the necessary facilities and resources. This challenge could be attributed either to the prioritization approach taken by MoEST when preparing school budgets or to how school administrations utilized the available funds. This implies that the absence or scarcity of a dedicated budget for guidance and counselling activities slowed down or undermined the proper functioning of the programme, ultimately preventing it from achieving its intended goals. The findings agree with those of Boitt (2016), Omoyemiju (2022) and Sibandze and Mfumbate (2019), who identified a lack of a specific budget among the top list of barriers to effective implementation of guidance and counselling programs in government secondary schools. Similarly, Omoyemiju (2022) highlighted that the lack of budgetary allocation for guidance and counselling activities poses a critical challenge for teacher counsellors in achieving their professional goals and the ideals of the counselling profession. Mgumba (2021) and Sibandze and Mfumbate (2019) postulated that when no funds are allocated for guidance and counselling, implementers (counsellors) are unable to procure the necessary materials and resources, thereby compromising the effectiveness of intended outcomes.

The lack of specific budgetary allocation for inclusive guidance and counselling activities contradicts the stipulations of the Salamanca statement and framework for action (UNESCO, 1994), which directs governments to allocate adequate budgets to schools to cater to the diverse needs of students with special needs, including SwVI. In a theoretical lens, such a deficit pauses a significant barrier, contradicting the provisions of the social model of disability, which advocates the elimination of such barriers to enable persons with disability to enjoy their rights and participate well in mainstream social activities and support services of the education curriculum (Shakespeare, 2010; SPECTRUM, 2018). The presence of this barrier disadvantages the SwVI in obtaining tailored services such as inclusive facilities and resources to cater to their unique needs. In other words, it excludes SwVI from enjoying specialized guidance and counselling services. The funding constraint also limits the availability of trained counsellors specializing in handling SwVI issues. Thus, it alerts the government through the MoEST to prioritize financial support dedicated to guidance and counselling facilities and resources to increase the availability and quality of these services in government secondary schools for the best outcomes.

Conclusion

This study unveiled a range of systemic, structural, institutional, procedural and professional barriers that hinder the effective provision of guidance and counselling services for SwVI in government secondary schools in Tanzania. These include the lack of specific counselling guidelines for students with special needs, the availability of professional counsellors, the absence of trained and certified counsellors, the availability of inclusive facilities and

resources, role overload among teacher counsellors and adherence to ethical standards in practice. Additionally, the absence of a dedicated budget exacerbates the marginalization of SwVI within school-based psychosocial support systems. Framed within the social model of disability, this study conceptualizes the identified barriers not as individual shortcomings of students with visual impairment but as systemic and structural failures within the education environment—failures that require critical interrogation and transformation to realize truly inclusive, equitable, proactive, and responsive school counselling services. Addressing these barriers is therefore not merely a technical exercise but also a matter of educational equity, professional ethics, and social justice. This study offers a foundation for policy dialogue and professional practice reforms aimed at promoting equitable access to psychosocial support for all learners, particularly those with visual impairment. It calls for policy revisions on national standards and the development of inclusive counselling guidelines with specific funding mechanisms to create an equitable, inclusive and supporting environment for optimal guidance and counselling services for students with diverse needs, particularly those with visual impairment in government secondary schools in Tanzania.

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