Navigating the Factors That Impedes the Promotion of Student Counselling in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions in Masvingo Province

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the factors that hinder the promotion of counselling services of students in Higher and Tertiary Education in Masvingo Province. Rogers's person-centred theory and Bindura's social learning theory were the principal guiding philosophies. Moreso, through a case study approach, the study applied both positivism and interpretivism principles. It also followed a mixed research design through the use of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The population comprised students, counsellors and lecturers. Stratified random sampling, convenience and purposive sampling were used to select the respondents. Besides, a sample size of one hundred and thirty (130) respondents were selected which comprised; 105 students, 6 counsellors and 19 lecturers. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires, interviews and observations. Quantitative data were analysed through the use of SPSS program and a content analysis approach was used for qualitative data. Data was presented using pie charts, tables, graphs and narrative form and was arranged according to research questions. The study established that the factors that lead students to seek counselling services were health-related problems, academic challenges and social problems. Individual and group counselling emerged as the main types of counselling services offered to students. However, in limited circumstances, pastoral and group counselling approaches were also used. The study also ascertained that students benefit from counselling services through enhancement of coping skills, social skills and academic skills. However, the main factors as established by the study which hinders students' access to counselling services were; limited access to counselling facilities, the, privacy of facilities and the gender of a counsellor. It was recommended that Institutions need to adopt a gendered approach in the provision of counselling services and recruitment of counselling staff.

Keywords: Counselling, Counsellor, Impedes, Masvingo Province, Tertiary Institutions

INTRODUCTION

The progression to Higher and Tertiary Education life can be stressful and challenging for many students. In response, most Higher and Tertiary education institutions including offer social support services to students through counselling, financial assistance, health and academic support (Nkoma, & Kufakunesu, 2024). However, despite the provision of such essential social services, students continue to experience negative thoughts, social problems, wayward behavioural issues, academic challenges, psychological issues and economic issues (Chitiyo et al., 2025). Thus, the need to assess the factors that hinder student counselling at institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education is very critical. Thus this study sought to establish the challenges that impedes the promotion of counselling at Higher and Tertiary Education students in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe,

Background to the Study

The motive behind providing counseling services in colleges and universities, is to enhance students' moral development and aid them in making crucial decisions that will shape their educational paths and future careers (Escapa &Julia, 2018). Transitioning to higher education involves facing various changes, including adjustments in living arrangements, academic environments, and personal responsibilities, which can lead to emotional maladjustment and depression (Odhiambo et al., 2023). According to Ahmed (2017) students may suffer from negative habits, poor relationships, learning difficulties, time management issues, emotional problems, and health concerns.

Various studies found a high prevalence of stress and psychological distress among university students globally, emphasising the necessity for robust support services to help students achieve their academic goals (Stallman, 2011., Ahmed & Jayakumar, 2018). Research across various countries, including the United States, Germany, Italy, and Africa, has shown the positive impact of counseling on academic achievement, personal development and coping skills among college students (Holm-Hadulla, & Koutsoukou-Argyraki, 2015).

In the context of Zimbabwe, Musika and Bukaliya (2015) highlight the role of counseling in enhancing students' learning motivation in open and distance education. Maupa (2020) discuss the relationship between high school counseling services and students' progression to higher education, while Mujnayaradzi et al. (2021) examine the effectiveness of school guidance and counseling services in Zimbabwean secondary schools. This study aims to address existing literature gaps by focusing on the effectiveness of counseling services for on-campus students in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, exploring how counseling influences students' coping mechanisms, social skills, and academic performance while addressing related challenges.

Statement of the Problem

There is scanty literature on the effectiveness of counselling services being offered to Higher and Tertiary Education students in the Zimbabwean context. Moreso, the relationship between counselling services and student coping, social as well as academic skills in an institution of higher learning has not been fully explored. Regardless of being provided with various supporting services, Higher and Tertiary Education students continue to endure limited coping skills, social skills as well as academic skills and in some cases leading to drop outs, (Ahmed, 2017). The unbearable consequences of this challenge affect not only the students but the entire fabric of human society. This study was therefore an attempt to assess the effectiveness of counselling services offered to Zimbabwean students in institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education and its contribution towards alleviation of student's problems and career development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature on the factors that hinder the student counselling in higher and tertiary education. The paper borrowed two theories namely, Person-centred Counselling and Social learning theories.

Rogers person-centred theory

Person-centered has its origin from Carl Rogers. The essence of person-centered counseling, based on the belief in individuals' inherent ability to navigate their issues and seek solutions, aligns with Rogers' view that humans, nourished by unconditional love and understanding, have the capacity to grow positively (Kabir, 2017). The theory emphasises the importance of genuine, warm, accepting, and empathetic relationships between counselors and clients, highlighting the significance of human interaction in the counseling process. (Nghamun & Bobga, 2016). This approach aims to help individuals, including students in Higher and Tertiary Education, discover new personal meanings and drive towards growth and adjustment. According to Comings (2023), the model underscores the role of the counselor in creating an environment of empathy and warmth to facilitate students' exploration of their thoughts and feelings, ultimately aiding in problem-solving and personal growth. The person-centered theory, as noted by Kabir (2017), does not only fosters realistic self-perception and confidence but also helps individuals, including students, overcome various personal issues such as anxiety, depression, and addiction, enhancing self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-awareness. The person-

centered counseling theory, with its emphasis on fostering genuine relationships and facilitating personal growth and problem-solving, holds significant relevance in understanding the effectiveness of counseling and student performance in Higher and Tertiary Education.

Social learning theory

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that behavior and the environment mutually influence one another, allowing individuals to learn new behaviors through observation, as outlined (Nabavi, 2014). Bandura emphasise the role of social interactions in shaping behavior and cognition, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between individuals, their environment, and learned behaviors (Nghamun & Bobga,2016). The authors further elaborate on how social learning occurs through observation and imitation, with behaviors being acquired and modified within a social context, suggesting that counseling interventions based on this theory can facilitate behavioral change and problem-solving skills among students in Higher and Tertiary Education.

The application of Social Learning Theory in counseling settings can lead to positive behavioral changes among students, enabling them to resist negative influences and adapt more effectively to social and academic challenges, as emphasized (Nghamun & Bobga, 2016). By creating a supportive learning environment and using behavioral counseling techniques, counselors can help students develop the necessary skills to navigate peer pressure, adopt positive behaviors, and achieve growth and adjustment in academic and social spheres, aligning with the theory's focus on behavioral change as a key outcome of counseling interventions in Higher and Tertiary Education, as highlighted by various researchers in the field.

Defining counselling

Counseling is a process aimed at aiding individuals in problem-solving and future planning, emphasising the establishment of a special relationship between counsellor and client (Vostanis, & Bell, (2020). Makinde (2014) characterises counseling as a helping process leveraging trust to access personal resources, while Kituyi (2014) underscores its role in guiding clients towards behavior conducive to problem resolution. Mikaye (2012) highlights the professional nature of counseling, stressing the importance of trained counsellors in educational settings to assist students in overcoming social and academic challenges. In essence, counseling serves as a psychological process that aids individuals in understanding their challenges, making informed choices, and resolving emotional or interpersonal issues, as observed by the researchers in this study.

Types of counselling

Individual Counselling

Cooper-White (2024) refers to individual counselling as one to one process which occurs between the professionally trained counsellor (Therapist) and his client (Counselee). The goal of this is to help the client to understand him/herself, clarify and direct his/her thought, in order to make a worthwhile decision, (Bobga, 2016). Moreover, Cuijpers et al. (2021) define individual counselling as a process which deals with emotional distress and behavioural difficulties that arise when individuals struggle to deal with developmental stages. The motive is to enhance the student's self-understanding and self-esteem. Kituyi (2014) adds that, individual counselling is more concerned with addressing and resolving specific problems such as making decisions, coping with crises, working through feelings and inner conflicts or improving relationships with others. It is a process in which the helper expresses care and concern towards the person with a problem so as to facilitate that person's personal growth and positive change through self-understanding.

Group counselling

According to Nghamun and Bobga (2016), group counselling is a process which takes place between the professionally trained counsellor and a group of people. The authors further expound that the number of this group should not be more than seven, or at least ten, in order to have a cohesive group and an effective well controlled counselling session. Similarly, group counselling is a procedure where a group of clients with similar issues or concerns meet with one or more therapists, or other facilitators, to discuss those issues, and to

learn about and share information and solutions about those issues (Corey, 2023). Members of the groups are clients/counselees whose tasks or problems that are meant for resolution are similar. All counselees express their feelings and the counsellor during group counselling is to help remove the marks covering the problem. The counsellor is not just a member of the group; he is to direct the affairs and situations (Yalom, & Leszcz, 2020).

The role of counsellors at institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education

Counsellors are psychological workers who perform psychological screening and basic assessment and technically limited psychological interventions with a range of people, aiming at enhancing personal functioning in a variety of contexts including school, work, sport and community (Kabir, 2017). In any case, Higher and Tertiary Education counsellors' roles focuses on developing the individual, incorporating the molding of students' attitudes and behaviours. Kabir (2017) further highlights that a counsellor creates an environment for the clients to explore their needs and involves intense personal involvement and honesty (Borders & Brown, 2022). In addition, the counsellor helps the client to focus on blocking energy and to positively and adaptively use that energy and helps the clients to discern life patterns. McCallen and Johnson, (2020) mention that the responsibilities of counsellors would include supporting student progress not only in academic and career matters but also with personal and social distresses. Shehu and Na'aalh (2024) also contend that the provision of counselling services is a beneficial part of education and developing the learner holistically.

Factors leading to students' need for counselling services

Yin-Fah, Sok-Foon and Migin (2016) claim that Higher and Tertiary Education can be an exciting yet challenging transition for students. Undeniably, the need for student counselling services in Higher and Tertiary Education has been observed and noted by many scholars across the world. Karimi et al. (2014) assert that students joining institutions of higher learning for the first time will certainly experience adjustment difficulties, fears and anxieties, career and academic issues and therefore are in dire need of counselling services. The students will experience problems with deciding who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life as they confront many roles from vocational to romantic in trying to get their real selves (Ladejo, 2023). The author further states that the young adults will struggle with issues of intimacy and choosing life partners while those at middle life will have midlife crises.

When students join universities and colleges for the first time, they are exposed to problems related to transition, orientation, career choice, adjustment and disciplinary restrictions (Muola and Migosi, 2012). Certainly, Higher and Tertiary Education can be an exciting yet challenging transition for students. This therefore calls for a relentless effort to identify the counselling needs of students and provide responsive mechanisms accordingly. However, in order to help students meet their counselling needs at various stages of academic life, a continuous needs assessment is important so that counselling programmes that are congruent to their needs can be developed (Katajavuori, 2023). It is therefore the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to undertake needs assessments and ensure that counselling services are effectively availed to students in an attempt to enhance their coping skills, academic achievement and social status.

Similarly, Lemesa (2018) notes that Higher and Tertiary Education institutions have a responsibility and obligation to offer counselling services to all students if they want students to attend and complete their academic programs successfully though small number of students seek and attend the service. However, this study recognises that the factors that lead to students' need for counselling services are quite diversifies and multifaceted in nature (Galbally, & Christodoulidi, 2024).

Ahmed and Jayakumar (2018) explain that studies of the characteristics of Higher and Tertiary Education students suggest a diversity of needs for career counselling programs.

Some of these career needs are; problems in the choice of careers, fear of failing examinations which leads to anxiety, worries about getting a job related to one's career choice, financing ones education, content overload, poor study habits and skills, poor concentration and understanding of subject content and concerns about some

inconsiderate and insensitive lecturers (Ahmed & Jayakumar, 2018., Ladejo, 2023., Galbally, & Christodoulidi, 2024). Similarly, Doyle (2023) notes that meeting career and educational needs is one of the daunting tasks for the majority of students in Higher and Tertiary Education.

In addition, Ahmed and Jayakumar (2018) also note that students suffer from problems like negative habits, poor relationships, time management skills, emotional problems and health issues which equally require counselling. Sealy (2023) elucidates that the areas that students seek counselling include; public speaking anxiety, self-confidence problems, lack of motivation, depression, lack of purpose in life, anxiety and nervousness, love and relationships, physical health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, weight, eating problems, psychological issues such as suicidal and homicidal thoughts, mood changes, phobias, problem solving, marital issues, traumatic life events and life transitions. Also, most of the students live apart from their households, trying to make new friends or gain financial responsibilities could make them feel insecure and stressed (Wilson, 2023). Kamunyu et al. (2016) highlight that the social and behavioral issues that affect students in institutions of higher learning includes drunkenness, drug and substance abuse, poor relationships with other students and sexual relationships which could lead to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Moreso, students face several issues and conflicts related to identity crises due to disintegration of social support structures, peer pressure, drug and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, grief, anger management, family problems, self-esteem, loneliness, adjusting to new life and academic issues.

The above discussion brings out key important issues; firstly, students' problems are multifaceted in nature. Secondly, counselling services should also be tailor made to address those specific problems. Lastly, a professional approach to address these needs is a prerequisite. These observations were also substantiated by Kamunyu (2021), who recognise that individual students are likely to seek professional help for different problems. Therefore, students in Higher and Tertiary Education need appropriate academic, coping and social skills to achieve optimum benefits from the educational programs and these can be achieved by offering effective counselling services which meet these needs.

Counselling services in Higher and Tertiary Education

Lemesa (2018) highlights that, the purpose of academic institution is to produce a competent and a good citizen through providing a quality education and conducive and supportive environment. However, this does not mean studying at an institution of higher learning is free from experiencing different stressors. Remarkably, the provision of counselling services in the education system has come to be viewed as critical in fostering personal values and learning motivation among students at all levels, in resolving problems linked to their career and in preventing addictions and undesirable behaviour, (Wilson et al., 2023). Thus, institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education have a responsibility and obligation to offer counselling services to all students, (Kamunyu, 2016). Zebron (2024) notes that counselling services are becoming an integral part of those educational institutions' activities which aim at creating a positive and stimulating learning environment. Hence, Wango (2025) conclude that providing counselling services is important in increasing the likelihood of students to continue and complete their studies.

Counselling services are established to assist a student to analyze himself/herself by relating their capabilities, achievements, interests and mode of adjustment to what new decision they have to make (Bobga, 2016). These services are very critical for the students because they need it to solve career, study, personal and social problems they encounter in life (Bobga, 2016). The institution is supposed to provide time, place, and personnel required for skilled assistance of individual students in working out solutions to their personal problems. The services are designed to facilitate self-understanding through individual or group relationships (Bobga, 2016). Kamunyu (2016) also emphasise that counselling is an essential service that must be available to students in institutions of higher education before they are accredited. However, Kamunyu (2016) avers that despite the availability of counselling services in tertiary education institutions, the propensity to seek the service depends on an individual student. Yin-Fah, Sok-Foon and Migin (2016) note that many institutions of higher learning provide counselling services to students who need it during their tertiary studies but many students tend to avoid counselling. Nevertheless, whether students access counselling services or not is another question which this research sought to explore and provide an in-depth understanding on the extent to which students seek counselling services.

The effectiveness of counselling on students coping, social skills and academic skills

The ultimate goal of providing counselling services in Higher and Tertiary Education is to ensure that students are capacitated to cope with their academic and social challenges to ensure that their goals are relentlessly achieved. However, this can only be realised if adequate and appropriate systems are put in place to enhance the achievement of that reverie (Ndwiga, 2023). The effectiveness of counselling on students coping, social skills and academic skills was expounded by various authors from diversified geographic settings and backgrounds. The common thread among them is the convincing evidence that there is a positive relationship between counselling services and students' achievements in various context (Holm, 2023., Cole &Tufano, 2024). Musika and Bukaliya (2015), elucidate that the effectiveness of counselling has been examined in several studies and has been shown to be generally effective. However, of particular interest to this study is the effectiveness of counselling on students' coping skills, academic achievements and social skills.

In their study, Ahmed and Jayakumar (2018) establish that counselling can effectively complement the student advisory services which would provide an internal impetus to enhance the acquisition of soft skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence and better coping skills. This will indirectly improve academic achievement, reduce attrition and increase retention. Certainly, counselling is the bedrock for achieving self-actualisation which helps students to discover their needs, interest and capabilities in order to formulate their own goals and make plans to realize them, (Oluremi, 2017). According to Ahmed (2017), the counselling services and programs help students resolve emotional, social or behavioural problems and help them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. Effective counselling programs are important to the institutional climate and a crucial element in improving student achievement.
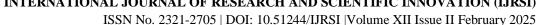
Thus, the provision of counselling services to students is an important instrument for the management of social processes and testifies to the strengthening humanistic trends in our society. Also, Yin-Fah et al. (2016) establish that counselling services is able to improve academic achievement, as well as enhance personal development and decision making. Nkala (2014) also expands that counselling provides developmental opportunities and experiences that address three central student development areas: learning (personal/social), learning to learn (academic), and learning to work (career). Moreso, it includes sequential activities designed to address the needs of all students by helping them acquire competence in the knowledge of self and others, in identifying their educational goals, and in their own career development. Counselling interventions have a substantial impact on students' educational and personal development (Ahmed & Jayakumar (2018).

Furthermore, the authors note that of the 70 percent of the students who attends counselling sessions, the results indicates that it had a positive impact on their academic performance. The essence of counselling is considered the most important determinants of human development for students. Furthermore, the campus life is very strenuous for students who have poor coping skills. Thus, effective counselling results in an increase of behaviours related to achievement such as improved study habits, efficient use of time and greater academic effort.

However, Lemesa (2018) points out that bodies of literatures have indicated that the provision of counselling on a college and/or university impacts students' success in their academic, personal, and professional lives by supporting their emotional and developmental growth and mental stability. Lemesa (2018) remarks that counselling is an integral part of education and is centered directly on this function, and it prepares students to assume increasing responsibility for their decisions and grow in their ability to understand and accept the results of their choices.

However, in spite of the fact that counselling services are vital for students, it is often neglected by some institutions across the globe (Ahmed, 2017). Students do not access these services due to various salient factors which this current study will also seek to explore if any.

In a study by Yin-Fah et al. (2016) on counselling services utilisation in a Malaysia Private University they found that many universities provide counselling services to students who need it during their tertiary studies but many students tend to avoid counselling. Kamunyu and Wango (2016) also reported that in Kenya, there is poor utilisation of counselling services by university students. Nevertheless, the problems that students face

calls for effective intervention to overcome them and be able to harness their energy for productive purposes. An organized guidance and counseling programme is essential in assisting students cope with the stresses they face while in and out of University (Bobga, 2016).

Challenges for the promotion of student counselling in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions

Broglia, Millings and Barkham (2018) explain that the challenges of student counselling services have been documented widely but continue to be a concern. Some of the challenges are discussed below:

Gender of counsellor and/counselee

Kamunyu et al. (2016) establish that a large number of students in the universities failed to seek counselling from counsellors due to a variety of reasons and the gender of the counsellor was also identified as a hindrance. The authors further aver that in some cases the male students do not seek help for masculine related issues from female counsellors lest they are seen as 'weak' or 'unable to cope' with issues. Likewise, Barragán (2024) also explain gender differences in help-seeking by the effect of masculine ideologies acquired from society. According to such masculine ideologies, men are supposed to be tough and strong enough to handle their problems and not to express their emotions (Bennett 2023); expression of emotions is considered a sign of weakness. Moreso, few female students would seek menstruation problems from male counsellors (Derry ,2023).
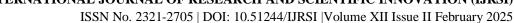
In that context, Barragán (2024) emphasise the significance of the similarities between the counsellor and the client giving advantages whenever the client and counsellor share similarities such as gender. Hence, the relevance of the social learning theory which provided the theoretical foundation for this study. It has also been observed that gender can significantly influence help-seeking behaviour (Renuka et al., 2017). For instance, women are more likely than men to seek help and to show positive attitudes towards help-seeking. In addition, women were more tolerant of the stigma associated with seeking professional help, more willing to recognise their need for help and more open to disclose their problems. In this line, Renuka et al. (2017) report that most of the students who sought help from a counselling centre were females. Thus, provision of counselling services should encompass a gendered dimension to ensure effective operationalisation.

Lack of trained counsellors

According to Bobga (2016), the effectiveness of counselling in institutions of higher learning can also be affected by the lack of properly trained counsellors. The author notes that, despite the fact that there are many holders of higher degrees in guidance and counselling, not as many are qualified to be real counsellors because they lack the skills necessary for the practice. There is limited number of trained counsellors and the ones already trained choose to go into non-academic settings. Similarly, some studies also indicate problem of critical shortage of professionally trained counsellors (Thériault & Gazzola, 2023., Maurya, 2024). A qualitative content analysis of ChatGPT's client simulation role-play for practising counselling skills. Nkoma and Kufakunesu (2024) argue that in Zimbabwe, the provision of counselling services is negatively affected by lack of trained counsellors.

Mistrust and loss of confidence in counsellors

Some students may see the counsellor as having a "hidden agenda" and this is more so where the student doubt the moral integrity of counsellors. This feeling becomes more serious when a male counsellor treats female students and gives the interaction high confidentiality (Bobga, 2016). This therefore, creates an element of mistrust and loss of confidence and subsequently the entire process becomes ineffective. Thus, some of the students will then consider seeking help from counsellors as a waste of time since they have their own ways of resolving problems (Kamunyu et al., 2016). The authors further elucidate that confidentiality is essential since it helps the client to trust the privacy of their revelations to the counsellor and it enhances the counselling relationship. Kamunyu et al. (2016) assume students will then express fear of being labelled in a negative way and end up not seeking the necessary assistance from counsellors. Chidumo et al. (2024) also note that attitudes related to trust and confidence have been found to affect the implementation and effectiveness of

counseling services. Clients expect that their secrets or privileged information be kept secret or confidential and not exposed to others (Bobga, 2016).

Inadequate funding

According to Bobga (2016), guidance and counselling are not well funded today and the education enterprise has become a costly venture. He further avers that; enough funds are not allocated to each institution of higher learning to run its various services. Where funds are available, very little is earmarked for counselling purposes. Certainly, the lack of adequate material resources to support Guidance and Counselling and lack of understanding of its purpose and importance both in an academic institution and even outside are critical impediments (Lemesa 2018). Chitiyo et al. (2025) in their study found out that in Zimbabwe, counselling services is negatively being affected by lack of resources. The authors further highlight that counselling in educational institutions is much complex since there are legal, professional and organizational issues involved.

Lack of commitment of Counsellors and /students

Bobga (2016) opinions that some of these services provided by counsellors are hindered because of lack of commitment of officers. Some counsellors are not fully committed to the counselling profession. Hence, there is still much to do when it comes to practical support and its implementation. In that regard, committed action will help the growth of the profession and minimise the challenges. However, in some settings, the students are generally not aware of the existence of any guidance and counselling services and this therefore creates a great challenge we well (Lemesa, 2018). Other reasons related to perception that made students' underutilise university counselling services included; perceived self-sufficiency, denial as a coping style, unwillingness to discuss personal problems and lack of knowledge about counselling services. Others attributed their failure to seek counselling services to being 'shy' and therefore unable to disclose to counsellors some very personal issues, (Kamunyu et al, 2016). Subsequently, students search for answers to address their problems from their peers or even the internet. There are also specific challenges where the counselling facilities are not conveniently located and this also has a negative impact (Kamunyu et al, 2016). Thus, Fazel et al. (2023) emphasizes that counselling services that are accessible when students want and need them are much likely to be effective than that which is available weeks late.

METHODS AND DATA

Research Paradigm

Saunders et al. (2010) define a research paradigm as a lens through which social phenomena are understood and studied, shaping researchers' perspectives and methodologies. Bhattacherjee (2012) likens paradigms to colored glasses that influence how researchers perceive and study the world. This study, guided by the person-centered theory and social learning theory, adopts a philosophical triangulation approach, blending positivism and interpretivism philosophies to explore the effectiveness of counseling services in Higher and Tertiary Education. This methodological fusion aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of counseling services' impact on students in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.

Research Approach

The study employed a mixed approach by integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to investigate counseling services for Higher and Tertiary Education students in Masvingo District. Quantitative methods, as defined by Saunders et al. (2010), provided objective and measurable data, while qualitative methods, as highlighted by Bhattacherjee (2012), delved into the nuanced complexities of social processes, offering insights that quantitative data alone might overlook. By combining these methodologies, the study aimed to validate findings, enhance understanding, and capture a holistic view of the impact of counseling services through questionnaire responses, interviews, and observations, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of methodological bias. This methodological synergy facilitated a deeper exploration of the subject matter, enriching the research outcomes with nuanced insights that would have otherwise been missed

Research Design

The adoption of a case study research design in this study, focusing on three Institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education in Masvingo District, including Great Zimbabwe University, Catholic University of Zimbabwe, and Bondolfi Teachers' College, was underpinned by its unique strengths, as highlighted by various scholars.

Salter (2023) defines a research design as the strategic integration of study components to effectively address research problems, serving as the blueprint for data collection, measurement, and analysis. Berinsky (2018) emphasizes the versatility of the case study method, allowing for multiple data collection techniques such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentary analysis. The case study strategy, lauded by Rainforth et al. (2024) and Saunders et al. (2010), excels in exploring new processes and behaviors, providing answers to 'why' questions, and enabling studies from multiple perspectives and levels of analysis. Despite criticisms regarding generalisability, the contextual richness and depth offered by the case study method made it the preferred research design for this study, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of counseling services within the Higher and Tertiary Education institutions in Masvingo Province

Population and Sampling

Asrulla at al. (2023) describe population as the individuals or elements under study, embodying the group sharing specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. This research encompassed students, counsellors, and lecturers within the Higher and Tertiary Education institutions of Masvingo Province. Due to constraints such as time and resources, it was impractical to involve the entire population across these categories.

The sample was distributed as in Table 3.1.

Table.1   Sample size of the study

Stratum	Female	Male	Total Sample
Students	55	50	105
Counsellors	5	1	6
Lecturers	10	9	19
Total	**70**	**60**	**130**

The researcher believed that a sample of 130 (though insignificant in percentage terms) was large enough to generalise the results of the study on condition that there was a high response rate. One hundred and thirty respondents were also believed to be ideal for the fact that it will be a manageable sample.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection tools in this study were the questionnaire and the interview guide. In this case, primary data was collected through the use of documented interviews, self-administered questionnaire and field observation techniques. The questionnaire contained both open and closed ended questions. Open-ended questions were included to give room for detail in respect to the challenges and suggestions. For generating qualitative data, face to face interviews were conducted and the study figured out important information from respondents through ancillary information, voice characters, attitudes and motions. In conducting the interviews, a set of questions was prepared to serve as a guide to stimulate discussion. In addition, through observations the researcher had the opportunity to access information that may have been missed by the interviewee. Thus, the gathering of first-hand information in the field gave the observer a holistic perspective that helped to understand how the counselling services were being offered. The observations were following the observation checklist and later followed by a short post-observation interview to help the researcher to reflect on the features and issues that were noted. The use of these methods gave the researcher greater control which ensured success of the study and data collected was very relevant to a problem at hand.

Data Presentation and Analysis

According to Long (2024), data should be presented in a manner that will communicate the maximum information in the most efficient manner. Accordingly, data analysis may take the form of quantitative analysis of quantitative data using statistical techniques such as regression or structural equation modeling, quantitative analysis of qualitative data such as coding, or qualitative analysis of qualitative data such as content analysis (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The following approaches were therefore undertaken to analyse data:

Quantitative Data

Data was successfully collected and responses were reviewed for eligibility, completeness, consistency and clarity. Saunders et al (2010) note that descriptive analysis is largely the study of distributions of one variable. This study provides us with profiles of companies, work groups, persons and other subjects on any of a multiple of characteristics such as size To achieve that, data was screened, coded and entered into a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data was mainly from interviews and field observations and the analysis was done through content analysis. Content analysis is a dynamic form of analysis of verbal and visual data that is oriented toward summarizing the informational contents of that data (Salmona, 2024). The strategy also involves careful evaluation of research data to keep track the findings that were emerging.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are herein presented based on research objectives as given below:

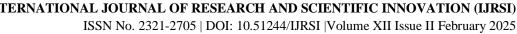**Which factors hinder students' access to counselling services?**

To identify appropriate strategies, the researcher also sought to understand the factors which hinder students' access to counselling services and the results are shown in table 2
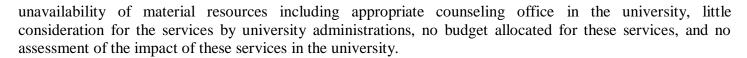
Table.2 Factors which hinder effective counselling

Factors which hinder effective counselling	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Slight extent	Not at all
Accessibility of facilities	**47.6%**	20.0%	25.7%	0.0%	6.7%
Privacy of facilities	**33.3%**	33.3%	19.0%	6.7%	7.6%
Counsellor gender	**41.9%**	37.1%	11.4%	6.7%	2.9%

The study results shows that effective counselling is negatively affected by limited access to facilities to a very great extent (47.6%). It is also affected by privacy issues to a very great extent (33.3%). Equally, the gender of the counsellor has a bearing impact on the effectiveness of counselling to a greater extent (41.9%). Similarly, it was also observed by Bobga (2016) that male students may never seek help from a counsellor who is female because the African culture never allows a man to go to a woman for guidance (Nkoma & Kufakunesu, 2024). It is therefore imperative that institutions should undertake a gendered approach towards the provision of counselling services to students.

Accordingly, the students were further asked to respond on counselling related challenges they were facing and the major challenges highlighted by the students were: lack of relevant information dissemination programmes, inadequate counselling facilities and in some cases the counsellors were not known by the students. These findings were also established by Lemesa (2018) who states the main challenges such as lack of students' awareness even about the availability of the services, lack of counsellors in the university or college,

unavailability of material resources including appropriate counseling office in the university, little consideration for the services by university administrations, no budget allocated for these services, and no assessment of the impact of these services in the university.

The counsellor's general perception regarding the challenges was that of counsellor-students ratio, which they said was not appropriate due to manpower shortages. Also, another challenge was that additional duties and responsibilities were being given to counsellors and thus overloading their work. On another note, one counsellor had this to say: *The institution is lacking a comprehensive plan for giving direction to student counselling services across its campuses; for instance, there are no counsellors who are permanently stationed at other campuses. Also, the numbers of students visiting the services are very low and there was a lack of student's awareness on existence of the services.*

However, despite the availability of counselling service in universities/colleges, the propensity to seek the service also depends on an individual student. On that aspect, one female lecturer who participated said: *Students fail to seek counselling help because of some reasons. For example, fear of being stigmatized, lack of trust with counsellors and tight academic schedule. There are also cultural values that prohibit men from seeking help such as men being discouraged to seek help from females.*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study revealed that students at Higher and Tertiary Education institutions in Masvingo Province face multfaced challenges that needs counselling services. Challenges included limited infrastructure, resource allocation, and student hesitance to engage in couple counseling. Counseling benefits included skill enhancement, stress management, and academic support. Barriers to access included facility limitations, privacy concerns, and counselor gender. Recommendations included awareness programs, expanded counseling facilities, incentivizing service use, integrating counseling into curricula, and ensuring confidentiality in all approaches to encourage student engagement and promote well-being.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions above, the following recommendations are made to the Institutions of Higher and Tertiary education, counsellors, students, the government of Zimbabwe and other stakeholders:

- Institutions need to adopt a gendered approach in the provision of counselling services that will involve recruitment of both male and female counsellors as well as ensuring that counselling facilities are conducive for both male and female students. Certainly, this will encourage more students to seek counselling services upon facing some challenges.

- Higher and Tertiary education institutions need to seriously commit resources towards the establishment of more infrastructures for the provision of counselling services. This may involve the establishment of more counselling resource rooms at each learning centre. Certainly, this will enhance the accessibility of services as well as enhance privacy issues.

- There is need to aggressively promote counselling services among the students through awareness programmes and the use of electronic media can be an effective medium for this approach. In that respect, Institutions of Higher and Tertiary education need to make use of online electronic channels such as Institutional websites, facebook pages and student portals to direct promotional messages to students.

- Provision of counselling need to be part of the university or college academic curricular. This will enhance student knowledge of counselling services as well as promote the likelihood of them to participate. Besides, guidance and counselling programmes need to be offered at lower levels such as high schools to prepare students for higher academic and social demands.

Strategies for continual improvement of student counselling services

According to Nkala (2014), in order to come up with an effective Guidance and Counselling programme, it is necessary to determine what support services and available resources are necessary to meet the needs of students, families and the communities. The following strategies are equally important in an attempt to ensure continual improvement of student counselling services:

Gender sensitivity

Kamunyu et al (2016) contends that Higher and Tertiary Education counselling service need to be gender-sensitive. Certainly, this will improve students' attitudes and perception towards counselling services. Awareness programmes should be vigorous to encourage more students of either gender to seek for counselling services. Knowledge about the proportion, issues and gender of students who use counselling services is also an important preliminary consideration in evaluating the effectiveness of such services. University counsellors can also work to make the terminologies they use to describe therapy/counselling more appealing to both men and women. For example, they can use terms like consultations and to make therapy/counselling more attractive to both males and females (Kamunyu et al, 2016). Bobga (2016) contends that lack of training of counsellors in gender analysis may lead many providers of guidance to render services and/or organize activities that may continue to maintain and enforce the already existing stereotype. Therefore, it is important that counsellors should design comprehensive guidance programmes, provide counselling service and use assessment procedures with a gender perspective.

Continuous staff development for counsellors

It is imperative that institutions of Higher and Tertiary Education should train and appoint qualified guidance counsellors help meet with the students' problems (Bobga 2016). Indeed, counsellors should be capacitated in order for them to aggressively raise awareness among students with an aim of enabling them to appreciate counselling and an acceptance that the issues over which they seek counselling help are normal.

Uphold the spirit of confidentiality

Confidentiality is a concern. Some students are of the opinion that some of the counsellors occasionally make students' issues public. Accordingly, Kamunyu et al (2016) recommends that effective counselling can also be achieved if counsellors regularly uphold the spirit of confidentiality. Certainly, this helps in restoring confidence in the systems and consequently influence students' access to the services. Equally important, counsellors should also uphold confidentiality and desist from discussing counselling cases in class (Nkala, 2014).

Establishment of convenient counselling centres

The counselling centres should be conveniently accessible for students to promote their usage. In addition, they should be friendly to students in terms of privacy and confidentiality of issues (Kamunyu, Ndungo and Wango, 2016). Counsellors should have adequate facilities and this makes easier for effective implementation of a counselling programme. Equally significant, the authors also say that an ideal guidance and counselling center should be a large room with display racks, bulletin boards and tables where materials can be maintained and displayed. Equally, Lemesa (2018), also recommends the provision of adequate financial and administrative support for counseling center.

Availability of resources

Government should support guidance and counselling practically by providing and making funds available for all the services in guidance and counselling (Bobga 2016). Makinde (2014) recommends that institutions of higher learning should provide finances which will allow their counsellors to have equipment and materials necessary for them to carry out their functions. The funds provided would enable the counsellor to get a regular supply of books, journals, magazines and visual aid materials, which in turn, will equip her/him with

current and accurate information for students. A counsellor will also require to occasionally invite a specialist speaker to talk to students or to take them out for tours based on relevant issues.

Recommendations for further study

The study certainly identified that there are many underlying factors which impact the effectiveness of counselling services to students. This study was therefore not exhaustive and it also opened some gaps for further research. From the study, areas needing further investigation arose and these are:

There is need to study how the provision of counselling services can be promoted effectively among students. The research will also help to get more information on whether the current promotion practices are serving their intended objectives and how best they can be developed

Future research should provide more detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis methods, including specific statistical tests and coding procedures for qualitative data.

Explore Systemic and Policy-Level Factors:

☐ Investigating the role of institutional policies, government funding, and leadership commitment in promoting counseling services could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities.

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