

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TANZANIA: IMPLICATIONS AND LESSON

Godrick E.Lyimo

PhD Student, School of Education
University of Dar es Salaam
P.O.BOX 35048, Dar es Salaam, TANZANIA

Joyce Mkongo

School of Education
Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies
P.O Box 35048, Dar es Salaam, TANZANIA

&

Suitbert Lyakurwa

School of Education
Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies
P.O Box 35048, Dar es Salaam, TANZANIA

ABSTRACT

Globally, since the establishment of formal schooling, counseling services in schools appear to be an important aspect in addressing psycho-social challenges affecting students' academic wellbeing. This paper investigates the cultural practices in professional counselling in secondary schools in Tanzania with a focus on implications and lesson. The study participants included students and school counselors. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews. The results show the importance of integrating cultural elements with professional counselling services in helping students' psycho-social challenges which affect their school academic wellbeing. These impacts include helping counsellors understand the historical and social context of students in schools, helping counselors understand social contextual factors surrounding social interactions, helping counselors better understand the students' needs, and helping school counselors to understand the students' cultural problems. Therefore, this study recommends that the government should rectify the counselling policy to integrate cultural elements into the professional counselling services in schools.

Keywords: Culture, professional counseling, students, implications, Tanzania.

INTRODUCTION

Around the globe, counselling services to students have been acknowledged to have great contributions towards learners' sustainability in schools. This is because it empowers diverse individual students to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (Abel, 2017; Sima, 2018). Thus, professional counselling means applying a combination of human development, rehabilitation and either psychosocial or psychotherapeutic principles, procedures or services that integrate a wellness, pathology and multicultural model of human behavior in order to assist an individual students to achieve mental, emotional, physical, social, moral, educational, spiritual, vocational or career development and adjustment through the life span of the individual, couple, family, group of individuals, organization, institution or community (Bitu, 2015; Mbera, Tuitoek & Yambo 2015; Mudis & Yambo, 2015).

Lee (2018) maintains that due to the world-wide diversity of cultural issues, professional counsellors are urged to integrate cultural issues with professional counselling during

counselling services to students. Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (2020) observe that since, social-cultural counselling has become a major force in professional counselling, significantly impacting theory and practice. Abel (2017) adds that as the 21st century continues to progress, it is increasingly evident that professional counselors must become ever more competent with respect to issues of culturalism and diversity. In this realm, Adrian (2022) proposes that professional counsellors should engage in considerable reflection to identify how their own cultural perspectives and worldviews influence their interactions both inside and outside of counseling. Moreover, professional counsellors should question how their perspectives are perpetuated in and shape client-counselor interactions, treatment decisions, planning, and selected counseling approaches and lastly, understand multiple worldviews and how these worldviews interact throughout the treatment process including the views of the counselor, client (student), family, other clients and staff members, treatment program, organization, and other agencies, as well as the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In various contexts, numerous researchers agree that school counselling has been introduced in schools to help students to solve their problems (Alotaibi, 2015; Bogba, 2016; Chikwature & Oyedele, 2016). The study conducted by Kanga et al. (2016) observed that students in secondary schools face several personal, social, emotional and academic challenges. If these problems are not attended to, they may lead to behavioral problems and student's poor academic performance. Thus, school counselling assists students to adjust and handle their academic, emotional and social problems which they face both at home and in school. In similar view, Iyabo (2016) adds that with the current world of globalization where other culture are shared by students worldwide, strong counseling services which will accommodate cultural challenges facing students must be practiced in schools by the professional counsellors.

The study by Namai, Manyasi and Mobegi (2019) maintain that emphasizing cultural considerations in school counseling is very important. It requires the school counsellors to clearly understand the client's ethnicity, background, and belief system. In this regard, it is very important for counsellors to be sensitive to how a student's culture impacts their needs in therapy (Maina & Sindabi, 2016; Mathai, 2015). Also, Mweemba (2016) opines that considering cultural issues in counseling services can significantly impact whether or not a student who will seek out therapy. He further cautions that it is essential to keep in mind the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. A study conducted in Malawi by Ndhlovu (2015) on the importance of cultural considerations on professional counseling indicated that highly religious students preferred and benefited from counselors who shared their beliefs. He further pointed out that even a counsellor who is sensitive and willing to interact in a religious or spiritual way increased trust and rapport with religious clients. This shows that for a student who is not a believer may not access counseling services. This has great challenges to the personal growth of students in both at school and at home. Another study conducted in Kenya by Nyambura (2014) on cultural aspects and professional counseling services in secondary schools reported that students were affected by many psychological challenges emanated from cultural issues hence, opined that counselors must be aware of students' cultural values and biases. Thus, counsellors should be trained to be aware of students' values and potential biases to ensure it does not interfere with providing the best quality of care. Another study which was conducted in Zambia by Gumisiriza (2022) on values of students in counselling services in secondary schools opined that counselor must be aware of the client's worldview. This is the foundation of culturally sensitive therapy in order to tailor therapy specifically to them. A therapist who understands or aligns with a client's spiritual beliefs may be able to use it as an effective tool for healing.

Moreover, there was a study conducted by Jackson (2015) on the role of counselors on cultural diversity in Uganda. The study found that the counselor should be careful to consider culturally appropriate intervention strategies because, cultural issues are often linked to spiritual beliefs. In Nigeria, there was a study by Obi (2020) on the importance of cultural aspects in counselling services, the study concluded that cultural understanding and sensitivity helps clients feel more comfortable. When students feel heard and validated by their counselors, it's much easier for them to open up without fear of judgment. In Ghana, the study conducted by Akufor (2021) on considering cultural issues and counselling therapy proposed that cultural background may influence a client's identity and life circumstances, thus, counselors should have an ability to play into the context of a given client's needs. In Rwanda, a study by Musa (2021) on the importance of cultural contexts on students' needs found that by becoming more aware and appreciative of the cultural differences among the clients, school counsellors will be better able to show respect for individual clients, provide assistance in ways that are culturally familiar to clients and develop positive relationships with clients. In South Africa, a study by Dube (2022) on the reasons for cultural considerations in professional counselling found that by being culturally aware, counsellors can recognize and appreciate students' values, customs, and beliefs and can meet them without judgment or prejudice. This shows that when counsellors are culturally sensitive they become aware of what is considered inappropriate or offensive to clients.

In general, from the literature, it has been shown that students have their own culture in which they have been brought up since their childhood to adolescence. Also, literature pinpointed that professional counselling has been used in schools as a therapy for students encountering psycho-social challenges. In Tanzania, little is known about proper integration of cultural practices in professional counselling in secondary schools to help students' psycho-social challenges which emanate from cultural aspects. Therefore, this paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by addressing the following question: What is the impact of culture in professional counselling practices?

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to investigate the impact of culture in professional counselling practices in Tanzania. The present study employed a qualitative research approach because it seems to be more applicable in capturing individuals' thoughts, feelings or interpretations of the meaning and process in their natural settings. Also, the study employed a qualitative research approach because it seems to be useful in getting in-depth opinion from participants, explore attitude, behaviour and experiences which are important as only a limited number of people take part in the research. Moreover, qualitative approach in this study was adopted because it seems to be important in obtaining first-hand information on impact of culture in professional counselling practices of which most of them seem to happen mainly qualitatively. The approach therefore seems to be most appropriate in comprehending issues deeply with regard to the impact of culture in professional counselling practices. The present study adopted a focus group discussion because it is likely to enable a researcher to identify ideas, opinions and beliefs from the informants. Also, focus group discussion is an inexpensive and quick method of collecting data (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the study used focus group discussion as method of data collection because ideas are kept under the control of the researcher and it enabled new ideas to be generated. For the purpose of not interfering with school teaching timetable, the researcher requested to the respondents to conduct focus group sessions after class hours.

On the other hand, the study used semi-structured interview with school counsellors. The semi-structured interview was used because they are likely to assist to get a broad understanding of the experiences of respondents about the issues regarding the impact of culture in professional counselling practices. Interview helped in getting detailed data on culture and professional counselling issues. The interview seems to be appropriate for this study because they are likely to motivate participants to express extensively on issues under investigations. Data for the study were collected from Kilimanjaro region. The region was purposively selected because they have a good number of public secondary schools which draw students from various cultural backgrounds, hence a good area to collect data from. A total of five focus group discussions were conducted in five secondary schools. Each group consisted of four participants. Also, a total of five school counselors were interviewed. The information from the focus group discussions and interviews was audio recorded and later on transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis Process

The data were analysed using the thematic approach as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013), whereby appropriate themes were identified, described and illustrated by the quotes from participants. Earlier on, before commencing data collection, a research permit was obtained from the University of Dar es Salaam. Thereafter, informed consent to conduct the study was also obtained from the respective authorities and universities. Confidentiality of the information gathered and anonymity of the respondents were ensured.

RESULTS

Several issues emerged from the focus group discussions and interviews regarding the impact of culture in professional counselling practices in Tanzania. These are discussed below.

Help Counsellors Understand the Historical and Social Context of Students in Schools

In secondary schools, school counsellors are supposed to integrate cultural aspects with counseling services. Through this, students' psychological challenges which emanates from cultural aspects will be attended to effectively hence, students will continue learning in an environment which is aware that the challenges they face could jeopardize their academic progress. Most of participants who participated in the focus group discussions and interviews explained that professional counselling to be effective in secondary schools, it should consider the historical, social and cultural aspects of the students. The participants gave the following explanations:

History tells us that before the advent of colonialists in Tanzania, there was cultural counseling almost in every society. Evidences show that colonialists brought a lot of changes to different cultures. They brought new counselling theories which undermine cultural counselling because it is not scientific. The cultural counselling values should be protected, respected and included in the professional school counselling in secondary schools because of their impact on the modern counselling (Interview with School Counsellor in School B).

Similarly, one of the participants during interview viewed the following:

In my view, I think culture that nurtured students must be included in professional school counselling programmes. This is because some of the cultural facets from the basis of problems of the students. Each culture has its exceptional ways of helping people to solve their problems (Interview with School Counsellor in School D).

These voices indicate that cultural aspects were very important to be integrated in professional counselling services in schools for the purpose of helping students. Participants argued that cultural values and counselling are inseparable because of the fact that the current society has inherited some values from the past generations

Help Counselors Understand Social Contextual Factors Surrounding the Interaction

Findings revealed that “interaction” appeared to be of major importance in counselling sessions. As a result, it was very important for the school counselors to adjust themselves to accommodate students’ cultural values that were very important to the clients. Furthermore, it was revealed that the context of counselling included the relationship among the students, the community, the cultural beliefs and cultural values which influenced both cultural problems and therapy. Furthermore, respondents claimed that the impact of culture in school counselling was to help counsellors to be aware of how socio-cultural issues like gender and sex affected lives of the students. Participants said the following:

By understanding the gender role from diverse societies, it was thought to enable school counsellors to use professional counselling to solve the problems of students from various societies. This is because some of our students’ psycho-social challenges were caused by both gender and sex (Interview with School Counsellor in School B).

Similarly another participant added the following:

I am so cautious when I counsel female students who feel inferior because of gender role and sex. I always show them the group of women from their tribes who have succeeded in life as their role models. This has helped to build confidence in them (Interview with School Counsellor in School C).

Quotations establish that some students lacked openness on the issues facing them because of cultural issues of feeling shy to disclose it. In this regard, through counselling services, students were likely to open up and disclose. Problem such as those associated to sexual relationships or change of the body due to maturity were to be addressed through professional counselling.

Help Counselors Better Understand the Students’ Needs

The second theme which was mentioned by the participants as one of the impact of culture in professional counselling practices in Tanzania was that understanding students’ culture help school counselors better understand the students’ needs. The participants further contended that students’ culture such as norms and attitudes had great impact on professional counseling as a result, when they are considered in professional counselling it will help school counsellors to practices counseling services by adhering to the historical, social context and needs of students. One of the participants argued that:

Students come from different historical and social context with unique knowledge and experiences which originated from their culture. These cultural differences have impact on students’ learning. For instance, students from different cultures can have different views on the value of education (Interview with School Counsellor in School A).

Similarly, another group of participants said the following:

I am a form four female student from Maasai community. One day I went to the school counsellor to seek for advice after my parents told me that education was for male. Therefore, when I will be backing home after my exams I will get married. Worse enough was that my parents had received the dowry from the family of the man who expected to marry me. I was stranded as I wanted to continue with my studies by joining A-Level (FGD with Student in School E).

The quotations aforementioned above show that school counselors' knowledge of students' cultural aspects helped them to engage into counselling services with a caution of not jeopardising students' cultural issues. By doing so, students with diverse cultural aspects were assisted without conflicting with their cultural issues.

Helps School Counselors to Understand the Students' Cultural Problems

Findings revealed that students were facing several challenges that affected their schooling process. Some of these challenges emanates from socio-cultural issues such as bewitched, demons, bad lacks, curse and fear of the unknown. All these challenges could be handled by school counsellors smoothly if the school counselors understand well cultural issues surrounding the society. In this regard, integrating professional counselling with cultural elements became important as participants shared the following testimonies:

When I got opportunity to study in this school, I planned to study hard for a better future. I set some strategies which I would use in order to achieve my goals and fulfill my plans. In form one especially the first term, I did well in my studies. The problem started in the second term where I started sleeping in the classrooms when teachers were teaching. Even during night preparation, I couldn't concentrate in my studies because of sleeping and loss of interest in studying. I went to the school counsellor who advised me how to study but the situation continue. The second term my academic performance was very poor. During the vacation, I informed my mother about my problem. She took me to the witch doctor who examined the causes of the problems. The witch doctor does some rituals and communicated with spirits, then he told my mother that our neighbour envy my academic performance and decided to bewitched me (FGD with Student in School D).

In similar vein, another student added the following:

One day, during the evening devotion, when pastor was praying, I felt very bad. I had much pain in my heart. The more the pastor pray, the more I felt bad and started to shaking and crying. I fell down and starting vomiting very bitter things. Pastor realized that I was possessed by evil spirits. He prayed for me by faith, the evil spirits got out of me, after the prayer service, I thank God because He released me out of evil spirit. I feel happy and have peace in my heart now. Currently I am doing well in my studies and have confidence of passing well the examinations and achieve my life dreams (FGD with Student in School A).

Quotations aforementioned above show that understanding cultural aspects that nurtured students were very important in keeping easy the work for school counselors during counselling services. Findings disclosed that without knowing students' cultural problems will become so difficult for the school counselors to handle students' psychological challenges which emanated from cultural issues.

DISCUSSION

This study found that cultural aspects were very important to be integrated in professional counselling services in helping students in schools. Participants argued that cultural values and counselling services are inseparable because of the fact that the current society has inherited some values from the past generations. These findings are in tandem with the previous findings by Morgan (2016) who noted that counsellors' cultural understanding and sensitivity helps students feel more comfortable. Similarly, Adrian (2022) added that understanding cultural issues surrounding students and applying them to the professional counselling help the clients

(students) feel valued and secured. Jovin (2021) viewed those cultural aspects such as race, ethnicity, and cultural background should be considered by the counsellors for the purpose of providing harmony among students in schools who had different ethnic backgrounds. From these findings it is clear to argue that collective knowledge, shared beliefs and values should be integrated into counselling for better mutual relationship between a student and counsellor. The findings also revealed that counsellors' knowledge of students' cultural aspects helped them to engage into counselling services without jeopardising students' cultural issues. Jonas (2021) supported that different cultural aspects and backgrounds among students affect the way they live in school environment. In similar vein, Samwel (2019) added that sometimes cultural differences with historical backgrounds among students create conflicts. Njoroge (2022) proposed that counselling services should be designed to harmonize the situation by carefully treating cultural values as much as an important aspect for students' welfare in schools. The findings further disclosed that counselling services' role is to empower counsellors to be aware with students' different cultural issues and in this regard, students will value counselling services as the services make students cultural values paramount.

Regarding counsellors' understanding the social contextual factors surrounding interactions with students, these findings establish that some students lacked openness to the issues facing them because of cultural issues of feeling shy to disclose it. In this regard, through counselling services, students were likely to open up and disclose psycho-social problem such as those associated to sexual relationships or change of the body due to maturity. Gerald (2015) opined that professional counselling should integrate with cultural issues that had up-brought the students. This will help students be open and trust those counsellors who value their good cultures. On the same note, Abel (2017) uphold that students whose cultures are valued by the school counsellors are ready to share issues such as those related to HIV/AIDS, family conflicts which children are forbidden to disclose to anyone. Kennedy (2021) suggested that since students are academically affected by economic status of the parents, it is important for counselors to explore economic status of students during interactions. This will help counsellors determine the magnitude of the problem and on how to help students.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that students were affected by several challenges which emanated from cultural aspects. In this regard, counsellors could face challenges on addressing such problems thus integrating professional counselling and cultural aspects became inevitable. Mwendamseke (2016) noted that in Tanzania, counsellors' face challenges on counselling students with cultural issues such as being cursed or be witched. On the same not Khumalo (2021) added list in South Africa, school counsellors were in dilemma on which strategy of counselling to use for students who claimed to be given a 'juju' from the bad people. Similarly OKonkwo (2019) viewed that since culture has not integrated into counselling services, many school counsellor are in dilemma to deliver counselling services. As a result, they use biblical quotations to cast out the demons. The finding seems to suggest the importance of professional counselling with cultural issues that are being practiced by the society for long time.

CONCLUSION

Generally, one can deduce that for better helping students' psycho-social challenges facing them in schools which originate from cultural elements, professional counselling should integrate them in counselling services. The research findings have shown that there are many psycho-social challenges facing students which need counselors to be aware of them for proper counselling services. What need to be emphasised alongside all these are the measures to be taken by the government to rectify the counselling policy to integrate cultural elements in the professional counselling services in schools.

REFERENCES

- Abel, J. (2017). *Investigating counselling services as a strategy of enhancing academic achievement of secondary school students in Tanzania: A case of Mbeya City*. M.A Dissertation, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Adrian, J. (2022). Religious cognitive-emotional therapy: A new form of psychotherapy. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry*, 5(3), 81-87.
- Akufor, G. (2021). Integrating cultural aspects with professional counselling in secondary education in Ghana. What are we missing? *Journal of Education*, 9(4), 78-86
- Alotaibi, T. (2015). Combating anxiety and depression among school children and adolescents through student counselling in Saudi Arabia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 25(5), 18-29.
- Bogga, T.J. (2016). An appraisal of effective provision of guidance and counselling services in Cameroon state universities: Trends and challenges. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, 3(9), 75-90.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- Chikwature, W., & Oyedele, V. (2016). The effectiveness of guidance and counseling in teaching and learning process at Gomorefu high school in Mutare district. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 3(5), 26-33.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Dube, H., (2022). Agency and communion: The relationship between therapy and culture. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4, 278-290.
- Gerald, A. (2015). *An inquiry into counselling interventions and student support systems at a university in transition*. PhD Thesis, University of Zululand.
- Gumisiriza, E.B. (2012). The need for guidance and counselling services today more than ever before. *Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 4(4), 12-17.
- Iyabo, P. (2016). Clinical counselling in schools. *Journal of Psychotherapy*, 3(9), 23-28.
- Jackson, R. (2015). Empowerment and mental health in community: narratives of psychiatric consumer/survivors. *Power Control and Health*, 11(2), 34-49
- Jonas, Y. (2021). . Developing culturally sensitive cognitive behaviour therapy for psychosis for ethnic minority patients by exploration and incorporation of service users' and health professionals' views and opinions. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 38, 511-533.
- Jovin, T. (2021). Contemporary psychotherapy and cultural adaptations. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 47, 61-63.
- Kanga, B.M., Nyaga, V.K., & Ngari, S.M. (2015). Effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in enhancing students' adjustment to school physical environment in public boarding secondary schools in Kenya. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 3(7), 201-212.
- Kennedy, A. (2021). Thoughts on reality therapy from a pro-feminist perspective. *International Journal of Reality Therapy*, 26, 23–26.
- Khumalo, R. (2021). *The cross cultural counselling experience: An investigation of perspectives of international students and counsellors*. PhD Dissertation, Monash University, Melbourne.
- Lee, C. C. (2018). Training counselors as agents of change: A pedagogy for social justice. *Counseling for Social Justice*, 2(3), 9-17.
- Maina, B., & Sindabi, K. (2016). The impact of the ban of corporal punishment on students' discipline in secondary schools: A case study of Bahati Division of Nakuru district.

- International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies*, 14(3), 850 – 862.
- Mathai, N. (2015). *Influence of school-based factors on students unrest in public secondary schools in Kwale County, Kenya*. M.A Dissertation, University of Nairobi.
- Mbera, P.A.G., Tuitoek J.K.F., & Yambo, J.M.O. (2015). Relationship between principals' management experience and academic performance in public secondary schools in Kericho County, Kenya. *Journal of Harmonized Research and Management* 1(3), 170-176.
- Morgan, J. (2016). *Perceptions of students on the status of guidance and counselling in selected universities in Kenya for minimizing student riots*. PhD Thesis, Kenyatta University, Kenya.
- Mudis, P. A., & Yambo, J.M.O. (2015). Role of peer counseling on the relationship between prefects and the students' body in public Secondary schools in Migori Sub-county, Migori County. *Kenya International journal of Academic Research in Progressive education and Development* 4(4), 136-149.
- Musa, E. (2021). *Basic career information for students*. Grace Publishers.
- Mweemba, F. (2016). Counselling services in Zambian education. Are they helpful? *Journal of Psychology*, 6(4), 102-108.
- Mwendamseke, I. (2016). Faculty and student perceptions of academic counselling services at an academic health science center. *Perspective Medical Education*, 6(2), 165–170.
- Namai, H., Manyasi, D., & Mobegi, V, (2019). Attitude of secondary school students towards guidance and counselling services in Kwale County. *Journal of Education Practices*, 2(1), 7-16.
- Ndhlovu, T. (2015). *Students' readiness towards counselling services in secondary education in Malawi*. M.A Dissertation, University of South Africa.
- Njoroge, K. (2022). Psychosocial stress and help-seeking behavior among undergraduate student teachers in Tanzania. *International Journal of Learning & Development*, 4, 70-90.
- Nyambura, N. (2014). The impact of family conflicts on children education. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education*, 4(2), 105-118
- Obi, D. (2015). *Engaging soft skills for superior counselling services delivery*. M.A Dissertation, Akintola University of Technology.
- Okwonko, N. (2019). Counselling services in secondary schools in Nigeria: Challenges and future prospective. *Journal of Psychology*, 6(1)89-102.
- Robinson, G., & Howard, L. (2020). The impact of a fully implemented guidance programme on the school experiences of high school students. *International Journal for Education and Vocational Guidance*, 1(3), 20-27.
- Samwel, H. (2019). Cultural sensitivity in public health: Defined and demystified. *Ethnicity & Disease*, 9(1), 10-21.
- Sima, R. G. (2018). The challenges in the provision of counselling services in secondary schools in Tanzania. *Education Psychology*, 4(2), 29-34.