



An Examination of Challenges in Delivering Guidance and Counselling Services to Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Secondary Schools in Tanzania

Alodia A. Ndumbaro¹

alodiaaloyce@yahoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8789-5306>

Alphoncina Pembe²

pembealpha@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7300-3497>

¹School Quality Assurance Office, Ubungo Municipality-Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

²Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies, The University of Dodoma

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.58548/2025.jmpie.13.3449>

To cite this article: Ndumbaro, Alodia, A., Pembe, Alphoncina. (2025). An Examination of Challenges in Delivering Guidance and Counselling Services to Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Secondary Schools in Tanzania. *Journal of Educational Management and Policy Issues*, Vol. 2 (1), 34-49.

DOI:10.58548/2025.jmpie13.3449

Abstract

This study examined the challenges and coping strategies in providing guidance and counselling services to students with disabilities in three inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach with an exploratory research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation methods. The research involved 32 participants, comprising three school heads, five teacher-counsellors, and 24 students with disabilities. The findings revealed six main challenges affecting counselling services: lack of training, resource constraints, communication barriers, multiple professional roles, lack of safe counselling spaces, and gender imbalances. The study also noted that teacher-counsellors employed various coping strategies, such as conducting outdoor counselling sessions, collaborating with special education teachers and senior female staff, and utilizing peer assistance. However, systemic barriers—such as risks to confidentiality and inaccessible physical facilities were noted to limit the effectiveness of these approaches. To enhance the delivery of guidance and counselling services, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should offer regular, disability-focused counselling training, including instruction in sign language and reduce the workload of teacher-counsellors. Furthermore, the government should invest in accessible counselling rooms furnished with appropriate resources. Strengthening collaborations with Non-Governmental Organisations and utilising online platforms can further improve training opportunities and resource availability.

Received: 23rd Jan 2025

Revised: 19th May 2025

Accepted: 30th June 2025

Published: 8th July 2025

Keywords: Guidance and counselling, students with disabilities, inclusive schools, Tanzania

Introduction

The provision of guidance and counselling services (GCSs) in schools has gained widespread recognition and practice worldwide, reflecting a growing understanding of the importance of fostering students' well-being and academic success. Guidance and counselling services play a vital role in addressing personal and interpersonal challenges, highlighting the importance of socially interactive approaches to problem-solving. In Tanzania, as in many other countries, various efforts have been made to recognize the significance of these services across all levels of education. The government of Tanzania has taken various steps to institutionalise these services within the education system through the policies and frameworks (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST), (2023); Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), 2014; Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), 1995).

The earliest policy laid the groundwork for the integration of GCSs into schools, resulting in Education Circular Number 11 of 2002 (MoEC, 2002), intended to provide clear directives for schools and teachers' colleges to establish counselling programmes. The circular was followed by the Guidance and Counselling (GC) Guide of 2007, which aimed to strengthen GCSs within educational institutions. This guide provided practical frameworks and resources to educational officers and counsellors, highlighting the need for trained personnel who can effectively help students navigate their psychosocial challenges. The continuing development and implementation of these policies reflect Tanzania's commitment to improving student support systems. It also aimed to ensuring that all learners have access to the guidance and counselling necessary for their full development and success in both academic and personal spheres.

Globally, the guidance and counselling services in schools are geared to help students across numerous domains, including behavioural development, interpersonal relationships, emotional development, psychological health, academic challenges, career choices, and specific needs for those requiring special accommodations (Owusu *et al.*, 2018). These services aim to create a welcoming environment that supports the full development of students. Despite the general importance of guidance and counselling services, there has been a disproportionate focus on addressing the needs of students without disabilities. This oversight has led to the neglect of the specific requirements of students with disabilities (SwDs), who frequently face unique challenges that require targeted interventions (Mgumba, 2021; Bakar *et al.*, 2019). Students with disabilities often encounter numerous obstacles and barriers that can hinder their learning and well-being in general. These obstacles include non-acceptance and discrimination from their peers, as well as limited support, both from within and outside the school environment (Kahveci & Küçük, 2016). These challenges affect not only their academic performance but also their social interactions and emotional health. Therefore, it is crucial to provide specialized guidance and counselling services tailored to the unique needs of students with disabilities. Achieving this requires the development of inclusive educational settings that acknowledge and effectively respond to the diverse needs of all learners.

Most existing research on guidance and counselling services in schools has predominantly focused on students without disabilities, thereby leaving a significant gap in understanding the unique challenges and needs of students with disabilities in this context. This gap is particularly in the context of inclusive secondary schools in Tanzania. Existing studies (Chikopela *et al.*, 2019; Bakar *et al.*, 2019; Ocansey & Gyimah, 2016; Majoko, 2013; Murugami & Nel, 2012) have mainly focused on other countries, highlighting the need for local research grounded in the Tanzanian context. For example, Chikopela *et al.* (2019) in Zambia conducted a study that examined challenges in providing HIV/AIDS counselling

to students with hearing impairment. Moreover, Ocansey & Gyimah (2016), in Ghana, studied the different counselling needs of learners with exceptional educational needs and disabilities. Furthermore, Majoko (2013) in Zimbabwe conducted a study on challenges encountered by teacher-counsellors in the provision of guidance and counselling (GC) for children with disabilities in inclusive primary schools.

Moreover, much of the available literature in Tanzania focuses on higher learning institutions (Mgumba, 2021; Rushahu, 2017). Despite of these studies addressing guidance and counselling to children with disabilities, they still leave a knowledge gap regarding the provision of guidance and counselling services to these students in secondary schools. Mgumba (2021) studied the status of counselling services for students with visual impairment in universities to see if they were adequately and effectively addressing the needs of these students. Moreover, Rushahu (2017) conducted a study to determine the extent to which guidance and counselling services were being provided to SwDs in higher learning institutions with the aim of supporting them in coping with the learning environment. Both these studies focused on higher learning institutions, but there are limited studies on guidance and counselling for SwDs in secondary schools.

To address the identified research gap, this study explored the challenges faced in providing guidance and counselling services to students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools in Tanzania. Additionally, the study investigated how teacher-counsellors in these schools were addressing the challenges they faced. By examining the challenges and coping strategies within this specific context, the research aimed to illuminate the effectiveness and adequacy of current guidance and counselling practices for students with disabilities. Two research questions guided the study:

- i. What challenges hinder the successful delivery of guidance and counselling services to students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools?
- ii. How do teacher-counsellors in inclusive secondary schools address these challenges?

By addressing these research questions, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on guidance and counselling services for students with disabilities in inclusive schools in Tanzania. The findings are geared to inform educational policymakers, school administrators, and practitioners about the specific needs and the strategies required to provide comprehensive support. This in turn will help to enhance the educational experiences of students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam Region in Tanzania. This region was chosen due to the high enrolment of students with disabilities in secondary schools, which is significantly greater than in other regions. According to the MoEST (2020), Dar es Salaam reported an enrolment rate of approximately 0.57% of SwDs in secondary education, surpassing the national average of 0.42%. This data indicates that the region has made considerable strides in inclusive education, thus making it a critical area for examining the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services for SwDs.

The study used a qualitative research approach with exploratory research design to explore the challenges in the provision of guidance and counselling services to SwDs in three inclusive secondary schools. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of teacher-counsellors and students with disabilities, particularly focusing on the complexities of their interactions, such as communication barriers. The exploratory design is appropriate given the limited existing literature on the provision of guidance and counselling services in inclusive secondary schools for students with disabilities (Swedberg, 2018). Together, these

methodologies provide a framework for uncovering the challenges and strategies involved in supporting students with disabilities in inclusive educational settings, eventually contributing to improved practices and policies in this critical area. The three selected secondary schools were specifically chosen due to their higher number of students with disabilities compared to other secondary schools in Dar es Salaam. This ensured that the study focused on the most relevant contexts for understanding the challenges in providing guidance and counselling services to students with disabilities. All selected schools were public, government-funded institutions located in urban areas of Dar es Salaam, reflecting the region's relatively advanced infrastructure compared to rural areas of Tanzania. The urban focus limits generalizability to rural settings, where resource scarcity may be more pronounced.

The participants for this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of three heads of school who represented the inclusive secondary schools where the study was conducted. Moreover, five teacher-counsellors were included in the study, with four of them selected from two schools in accordance with the requirements outlined in Tanzania's Education Circular No. 11 of 2002, which mandates that schools have both male and female teacher-counsellors (MoEC, 2002). It is important to note that one school had only a male teacher-counsellor. Furthermore, a total of 24 students with disabilities (SwDs) were included in the study. The students represented a range of disabilities, including hearing impairments, physical disabilities, visual impairments, and multiple disabilities, such as a combination of physical disability with either visual or hearing impairment. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the students' demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of student participants

Type of Disability	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Hearing impairments	3	3	6
Physical disabilities	7	7	14
Visual impairments	1	0	1
Multiple disabilities	1	2	3
Total	12	12	24

The inclusion of students with diverse disabilities provides varied perspectives on GCSs. The study involved a higher number of students with physical disabilities compared to other categories. This disparity occurred because two of the three selected schools primarily enrolled students with physical disabilities, resulting in a larger representation of this group. Gender balance was maintained, with 12 male and 12 female participants, to ensure that challenges faced by both groups were adequately identified, including those related to gender imbalance in counselling services. The study focused on students from Form II to IV, as Form I students were new to the school and had limited experience with GCSs. The age of the involved students ranged from 13 to 18 years.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observation. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted within the school setting with teacher-counsellors and school heads. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 minutes, allowing participants to share their experiences without undue time constraints. Note-taking and an audio recorder were used during interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to ensure comprehensive data capture. FGDs were employed to collect data from students with disabilities, involving three groups of eight students each. A sign language interpreter facilitated communication

for students with hearing impairments, while a discussion leader was strategically positioned to enable lip-reading, ensuring that conversations were both audible and understandable to all participants. Pre-discussion meetings were conducted to clarify the process, and FGDs were structured to promote engagement from all students. This approach ensured the effective inclusion of diverse perspectives on the challenges associated with guidance and counselling services. Each FGD lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, incorporating structured prompts to foster participation and mitigate dominance, thereby ensuring that all voices were heard. Moreover, the observation method was used to observe the availability and suitability of the counselling rooms for students with disabilities. The focus was on assessing whether these rooms were easily accessible and provided a sense of security for students with disabilities. The method was also used to observe whether the furniture style and arrangement within the counselling rooms accommodated these students.

The data were thematically analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-stage framework to examine the challenges and strategies involved in providing GCSs to students with disabilities. The process commenced with familiarisation, involving the transcription of all audio-recorded interviews and FGDs verbatim, followed by multiple readings of the transcripts to ensure a deep understanding of participants' experiences within the Tanzanian context. Initial coding was then conducted manually, segmenting data line by line to generate codes that captured diverse perspectives, including variations in viewpoints between students and head teachers. In the third phase, codes were grouped into potential themes; for instance, "no sign language skills" and "use of interpreters" were consolidated under the main theme "communication barriers". These themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, clarity and coverage. In the definition phase, themes were precisely articulated to capture their essence, such as defining "communication barriers" as the challenges faced by counsellors in counselling students with hearing impairments due to their lack of proficiency in sign language. Finally, the findings were reported, organised into six themes with supporting quotes, ensuring alignment with the research questions.

This study also adhered to ethical considerations at every stage of the research process, with a strong emphasis on participant protection. Prior to data collection, the study received approval from the relevant authority. Also, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the nature and scope of their involvement in the study. For students, additional consent was secured from parents or guardians. Similarly, in order to maintain confidentiality, the identities of participants and schools were omitted from all the documentation and reports. In addition, interview and discussion recordings were securely stored to protect privacy.

Results

This section presents the study's findings on the challenges that hinder the provision of guidance and counselling services to students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools. It also presents the strategies teacher-counsellors use to address these challenges. These particular issues are illustrated below.

Lack of training

The findings revealed that only one of five teacher-counsellors across the three schools had formal training in guidance and counselling but lacked expertise in supporting students with disabilities. The remaining teacher-counsellors demonstrated limited knowledge in both guidance and counselling and disability support. Those appointed without specialised training relied primarily on their general teaching skills to fulfill counselling roles. Additionally, four teacher-counsellors

reported having no in-service training since assuming their roles. A teacher-counsellor from school A stated:

I have not received any training since I finished school ten years ago. I have been serving as a counsellor to students with disabilities for four years now... The world is changing rapidly, and students face challenges related to this change. Therefore, training us as counsellors will improve the guidance and counselling services (Interview with teacher-counsellor, School A).

Another teacher-counsellor from school B made a rejoinder to the lack of training by saying:

I have been a counsellor for two years, with 10 years of experience in the teaching profession, but I have not received any guidance and counselling training since I took on the post. I use my experience to provide the service. However, it is challenging to deliver satisfying services because there are no guidelines or counselling protocols to direct me on what to do (Interview with teacher-counsellor I, School B).

The narratives above suggest that the lack of professional development limited their ability to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, such as those with hearing or visual impairments.

Resource constraints

The effectiveness of guidance and counselling services for students with disabilities in inclusive schools is hindered by inadequate physical resources. None of the three schools had dedicated counselling rooms. In two of the schools, the spaces used for counselling also served as libraries or storage areas, cluttered with books, unused wheelchairs, and personal belongings. A teacher-counsellor from school A, expressing concern about the lack of suitable counselling space, reported that:

The counselling room has multiple functions; as you can see, there are books. This room is also used as a library. In a real sense, this is not a counselling room as it is not possible to run the counselling session while students come to borrow books. Sometimes, we need to shift to another location where it is comfortable to continue our counselling sessions (Interview with teacher-counsellor, School A).

In contrast, the head teacher of school B reported a complete lack of a counselling room. That head of school had stated:

We do not have a counselling room in our school. This has been affecting the confidentiality of GCSs because school counsellors share the office with other teachers. Therefore, when the need arises, the counsellor must look for a space outside to talk to the client and sometimes provides the service when other teachers are in the office. However, it should be noted that students have personal issues that they do not want to share with other teachers. Therefore, this situation affects the counselling sessions (Interview with the head teacher of School B).

The quotes above suggest that the lack of dedicated counselling rooms in the surveyed schools significantly affects the quality of guidance and counselling services. This situation hinders the effectiveness of counselling and discourages students from openly sharing personal concerns. Furthermore, observations revealed several inadequacies in the counselling facilities. There were no waiting areas, cupboards, or appropriate seating for students with physical disabilities. Additionally, there was a shortage of essential counselling materials, such as guidance manuals and student records.

Communication barriers

The study found that students with hearing impairments encountered communication challenges due to teacher-counsellors' lack of sign language proficiency. Some students used local sign language, which is unfamiliar to most staff, including special education teachers. This finding is supported by a teacher-counsellor from school B who stated:

I am a school counsellor, but I do not work with deaf students because I am unable to communicate with them, and I do not know sign language. Therefore, everything related to guidance and counselling for students with deafness is taken care of by their department (Interview with teacher-counsellor II, School B).

The quotation from the teacher-counsellor indicates that students with hearing impairments were not receiving adequate guidance and counselling services on par with other students. This was due to teacher-counsellors' lack of the sign language skills necessary for meeting effective communication.

Multiple roles

Teacher-counsellors, hired initially as teachers, also assumed counselling responsibilities while managing demanding teaching loads. This dual role significantly limited the time available for providing guidance and counselling services, especially for students with disabilities. Additionally, teacher-counsellors reported that their teaching responsibilities were equivalent to those of other teachers, leaving little room for dedicated counselling work. They also acknowledged that they were responsible for a larger number of students than they could effectively support through guidance and counselling. A teacher-counsellor from School C expressed this concern by stating:

I am a teacher-counsellor with the same workload as other teachers. I know that providing guidance and counselling to students is very important, but it needs enough time and attention to what the student is telling you. However, sometimes, I cannot spend more time with them because I need to finish the syllabus on time (Interview with teacher-counsellor I, School C).

This finding revealed that teacher-counsellors had large workloads, which prevented them from assisting students in GCSs because they had to ensure they completed their teaching assignments as planned.

Lack of safe counselling spaces

The study findings revealed further that the counselling environment was often either inaccessible or lacked privacy. Among the three schools, only one provided a welcoming setting where students with disabilities, particularly those who use wheelchairs, could move freely throughout the premises. This school featured ramps in various locations, including what appeared

to be the counselling room, facilitating greater mobility. However, further examination of the school's guidance and counselling facilities for SwDs revealed some limitations. Notably, the designated counselling room was relatively small, creating difficulties for wheelchair users to comfortably navigating the space.

Moreover, in two studied schools, counselling rooms were noted to have steps, making them inaccessible for wheelchair users. Additionally, these rooms lacked clear signage to indicate their purpose as guidance and counselling spaces, which could be disorienting for students unfamiliar with the school environment. Furthermore, the counselling rooms were located in open areas, exposing individuals inside to anyone outside. During an interview, a student from School A expressed a concern, stating, "The open space makes me feel exposed" (Focus Group Discussion, School A). This lack of privacy could invite unwanted attention, potentially undermining the effectiveness of counselling sessions. These findings suggest that the inadequacy of the counselling environment negatively impacts the well-being of students with disabilities (SwDs). This in turn potentially can lead to psychological challenges. Additionally, the absence of a safe counselling space affected teacher-counsellors who were responsible for ensuring that SwDs received the necessary support and services.

Gender imbalance

The study findings revealed that one school had only a male teacher-counsellor. His presence affected female students' comfort when discussing sensitive issues. Not all students felt at ease sharing their challenges with a counsellor of the opposite sex, particularly on topics related to sexuality. During the interview, the teacher-counsellor from school A stated:

I am just a counsellor here, and sometimes these girls tend to hide their issues when I try to help them due to feelings of shyness. In such cases, I involve older female teachers to communicate with them, and the students feel more comfortable opening up about their problems. (Interview with teacher-counsellor, School A).

In a similar direction, during the focus group discussion, one of the female students from school A said:

I prefer a female teacher-counsellor as I feel more comfortable discussing my problems with a woman. Even if the issues are academic, I find it easier to approach my classroom teacher, who is a woman, to seek guidance and support (Focus Group Discussion, School A).

This suggests that some students were unable to access GCSs due to the absence of a teacher-counsellor of their gender. As a result, some of these students may have been left with unresolved issues. These findings underscore the significant impact of gender imbalance on the effectiveness and accessibility of guidance and counselling services.

Strategies to address challenges in providing guidance and counselling to students with disabilities

This section presents the coping strategies employed by teacher-counsellors to address the challenges identified in providing guidance and counselling services (GCSs) to students with disabilities (SwDs) in inclusive secondary schools in Tanzania. These strategies target six key

challenges: lack of training, resource constraints, communication barriers, multiple roles, lack of safe counselling spaces, and gender imbalance.

Collaboration

To compensate for the lack of specialised training in counselling SwDs, teacher-counsellors relied on their general teaching experience and informal peer consultations. For instance, in School A, a teacher-counsellor described collaborating with colleagues to share strategies for engaging SwDs, although this process was ad hoc and not guided by formal training. This approach had limited effectiveness, as it lacked structured professional development. Consequently, teacher-counsellors were ill-equipped to address complex needs, particularly those of students with multiple disabilities. The absence of in-service training, as reported by four out of five teacher-counsellors, highlights the need for systematic capacity-building to enhance service delivery.

Improvisation

To address the lack of dedicated counselling rooms and appropriate furniture, teacher-counsellors improvised by using alternative spaces, such as outdoor areas. In School B, a teacher-counsellor conducted sessions outdoors to ensure a degree of privacy. This teacher-counsellor stated:

I usually conduct counselling sessions outside the office to ensure confidentiality for the students, especially those who are hard of hearing, as I speak slowly and loudly to ensure they can hear and understand. I also wanted to avoid disrupting other teachers in the office who have other activities to do (Interview with teacher-counsellor II, School B).

However, outdoor settings were prone to interruptions, compromising confidentiality and session quality. Students reported feeling exposed, with one noted, "It is hard to talk about personal issues when others can overhear" (Focus Group Discussion, School B). The lack of secure storage for counselling records further exacerbated confidentiality risks, as documents were often kept in shared offices. These makeshift arrangements underscore the urgent need for specialised, well-equipped counselling facilities that ensure both privacy and accessibility.

Using sign language experts

For students with hearing impairments, teacher-counsellors relied on special education teachers proficient in sign language or student interpreters to facilitate communication. In School B, a head teacher explained:

Failure to understand sign language is a big challenge for counsellors, teachers, other staff, and students too. This situation poses a big challenge in addressing students' difficulties, not only in counselling but also in other issues. To address this problem, counsellors must use other individuals who know sign language to interpret conversations or transfer counselling cases to special education teachers who understand sign language (Interview with the head teacher, School B).

While the solutions enabled some access to GCSs, they raised significant ethical concerns, as involving non-counsellors breached confidentiality. A student with hearing impairment said, "I do not always feel comfortable when another student interprets for me" (Focus Group Discussion, School C).

The use of interpreters was a short-term solution but ineffective for fostering trust or ensuring privacy. Long-term, hiring counsellors trained in sign language would be more effective and ethically sound.

Managing multiple roles

To manage the heavy workload associated with their dual roles as teachers and counsellors, teacher-counsellors prioritised teaching responsibilities, often scheduling counselling sessions outside regular hours. A teacher-counsellor from School C stated, “I meet students after classes, but it is exhausting, and I cannot always give them enough time” (Interview with teacher-counsellor I, School C). This approach reduced both the availability and quality of counselling services, with students reporting limited access to timely support. While delegating some counselling tasks to special education teachers helped alleviate the burden, it also led to inconsistencies in service delivery. Reducing teaching loads for teacher-counsellors could enhance their ability to provide effective GCSs.

Creating safe counselling spaces

To address inaccessible or unsuitable counselling environments, particularly for students with physical disabilities, teacher-counsellors used open spaces or relied on peer assistance to access rooms with steps. In School A, peers helped wheelchair users enter the counselling room, but this compromised privacy and dignity, with one student stating, “I feel embarrassed needing help to get inside” (Focus Group Discussion, School A). Outdoor sessions, although accessible, were disrupted by environmental noise and lacked confidentiality. These strategies were minimally effective, as they failed to create a secure and welcoming environment, an essential component of effective counselling. Retrofitting schools with ramps and dedicated, accessible counselling rooms is crucial for achieving meaningful, long-term improvements in service delivery.

Gender sensitivity

In School A, where only a male teacher-counsellor was available, female students’ discomfort discussing sensitive issues was mitigated by involving elderly female teachers. This was reported by one of the head teachers who narrated:

Female students indeed face difficulties in seeking counselling from the male teacher-counsellor. ... However, we are using older female teachers to provide this service to the students (Interview with head teacher, School A).

This strategy improved student engagement, with female students reporting greater comfort sharing with female teachers (Focus Group Discussion, School A). However, involving non-counsellors risked breaching confidentiality, and the absence of a trained female counsellor limited the depth of support. Ensuring that both male and female counsellors, as mandated by Education Circular No. 11 of 2002, would better address the gender-specific needs.

While these strategies provided temporary solutions, their effectiveness was limited by systemic constraints. Outdoor counselling and reliance on non-counsellors, such as special education teachers or student interpreters, provided short-term solutions to access challenges but frequently compromised confidentiality, a fundamental principle of effective guidance and counselling services. Many students expressed reluctance to share personal issues in non-private settings or through intermediaries, highlighting the ethical and emotional risks of these practices. Although there is limited follow-up data to assess long-term outcomes, student feedback strongly suggests that these

approaches undermined both trust and meaningful engagement in the counselling process. Alternative solutions, such as training counsellors in sign language or establishing dedicated counselling spaces, would enhance both effectiveness and ethical integrity. A summary of the challenges and corresponding strategies is presented in **Table 2**.

Challenge	Description of challenge	Strategies to address challenges
Lack of training	Only one of five teacher-counsellors had formal training, not specific to SwDs, and four reported no in-service training.	Relied on teaching experience and peer advice. For example, a School A teacher-counsellor shared strategies with colleagues.
Resource constraints	No dedicated counselling rooms, the available counselling spaces were also used as libraries or storage, and lacked suitable chairs and materials.	Used outdoor spaces or shared offices. For example, a School B teacher-counsellor conducted sessions outside to ensure privacy.
Communication barriers	Teacher-counsellors lacked sign language skills for students with hearing impairments; some students used unfamiliar local sign language.	Depended on special education teachers or student interpreters, such as School B, which transferred cases to sign language teachers.
Multiple roles	Teacher-counsellors balanced teaching and counselling, limiting GCS time.	Scheduled sessions after hours or delegated to special education teachers. For example, a School C teacher-counsellor met students post-class.
Lack of safe counselling spaces	Inaccessible or open counselling rooms reduced privacy and access.	Used open areas or peer assistance for access. For example, School A peers helped wheelchair users enter rooms.
Gender imbalance	Only a male counsellor in one school, affecting the comfort of female students.	Involved elderly female teachers. For example, School A used female teachers to support female students.

Discussion

The lack of qualified personnel emerged as a significant challenge, as most teacher-counsellors lacked specialised training in counselling SwDs. Only one teacher-counsellor had professional training; however, it was not specific to disabilities, highlighting a gap in expertise. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as Ntilisinda (2017) in Tanzania, which reported that most teacher-counsellors lacked formal training in guidance and counselling. Likewise, Zimba & Changala (2018) found that primary school teachers in Zambia's Lilanda Zone were inadequately trained to provide GCSs. In Nigeria, Adaka *et al.* (2024) noted that counsellors at the Federal University of Lafia

struggled to address the needs of students with hearing impairments due to a lack of specialised skills, mirroring the communication barriers identified in this study.

Globally, Bakar *et al.* (2019) reported that teachers providing counselling for special education students in Malaysia lacked adequate training, resulting in ineffective service delivery. Similarly, Aloteabi (2018) in Saudi Arabia highlighted that teacher-counsellors in secondary schools lacked counselling skills due to inadequate training, a challenge also evident in Tanzanian secondary schools. Harris (2013) further emphasised that counselling SwDs requires specific competencies, such as knowledge of adaptive communication methods, which are often not common in under-resourced settings like Tanzania. In contrast to countries like Zambia and Nigeria, which offer occasional training programmes, and Malaysia, where training exists but remains insufficient for addressing special needs, Tanzania faces a more critical challenge due to the complete absence of consistent in-service training for teacher-counsellors. This deficiency is evident in the widespread reliance on outdated knowledge acquired during initial teacher education, as noted by a participant from School A. These findings expose a significant gap within Tanzania's teacher professional development framework and highlight the urgent need for targeted, specialised training to equip counsellors with the skills necessary to support students with disabilities effectively.

Communication barriers, particularly for students with hearing impairments, posed a significant challenge, as teacher-counsellors often lacked proficiency in sign language. Consequently, they relied on special education teachers or student interpreters, which compromised confidentiality. Chikopela *et al.* (2019) reported a similar issue in Zambia, where counsellors used student interpreters for HIV/AIDS counselling, highlighting a broader trend of inadequate counsellor preparation for deaf students. In contrast, global studies, such as Harris (2013), suggest that developed countries frequently employ certified sign language interpreters, a practice that is less feasible in Tanzania due to resource constraints. This comparison highlights Tanzania's unique challenge of limited human resources, where even special education teachers are burdened with excessive workloads. In contrast, wealthier contexts and developed countries often have dedicated support staff, allowing for more effective and specialised service delivery.

Resource constraints, including the absence of dedicated counselling rooms and appropriate furniture, further hindered the delivery of GCSs. This finding aligns with Majoko's (2013) study in Zimbabwe, which identified a lack of counselling rooms and materials in inclusive primary schools. Similarly, Milambo (2018) in Zambia and Bakar *et al.* (2019) in Malaysia observed that inadequate infrastructure, such as shared or multifunctional counselling spaces, impeded GCS accessibility. Globally, Pearson & Wilson (2012) advocate for counselling spaces designed to promote security, a standard that is regularly unmet in Tanzanian schools, where rooms often serve multiple purposes, including functioning as libraries or storage areas. Tanzania's resource scarcity, driven by limited educational budgets (TEN/MET, 2021), worsens these challenges compared to countries with stronger funding mechanisms, emphasising the need for prioritised resource allocation.

Moreover, the issue of multiple roles, where teacher-counsellors balanced both teaching and counselling duties, aligns with findings by Wambeti & Mwenda (2016) in Kenya, who reported that dual roles reduce the effectiveness of GCSs. Likewise, Chikopela *et al.* (2019) and Zimba & Changala (2018) highlighted workload issues in Zambia, suggesting a regional trend in which teacher-counsellors prioritise teaching over counselling due to syllabus demands. Globally, Kahveci & Küçük (2016) in Turkey observed that unclear counsellor roles exacerbate this issue, a challenge also clearly evident in Tanzania, where job descriptions lack clarity (See Interview, School C). Tanzania's distinct context

is characterised by high student-to-counsellor ratios, which intensify workload pressures compared to countries with more structured counselling systems.

Inaccessible counselling spaces, particularly for wheelchair users, posed a significant barrier, with steps at entrances and small rooms restricting access. UNESCO (2018) reported similar environmental challenges in Malawi's technical colleges, where SwDs faced mobility difficulties. Adaka *et al.* (2024) identified comparable issues in Nigeria, suggesting a broader regional trend of non-inclusive infrastructure. Globally, accessibility standards, such as ramps and spacious counselling rooms, are more consistently implemented in developed nations, underlining Tanzania's infrastructural lag due to economic constraints. This comparison emphasises the urgent need for Tanzania to adopt universal design principles in school infrastructure to enhance accessibility for SwDs. The gender imbalance, exemplified by one school having only a male counsellor, directly contravened Education Circular No. 11 of 2002, which mandates the appointment of both male and female teacher-counsellors in coeducational schools. While this issue was less prominent in regional studies, it aligns with findings by Oluka & Egbo (2014), who stressed the importance of gender-sensitive counselling in ensuring students' comfort. Likewise, globally, gender balance in counselling is recognised as critical for addressing sensitive issues, particularly for female students (Harris, 2013).

The findings have important implications for the implementation and revision of Tanzania's educational policies, particularly Education Circular No. 11 of 2002, which mandates the provision of guidance and counselling services (GCSs) in schools. The lack of training and sign language proficiency among teacher-counsellors' points to weak policy enforcement, as many schools neither offer in-service training nor employ specialised staff. To address these gaps, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) could strengthen compliance by mandating annual training programmes specifically focused on counselling students with disabilities. These programmes should include sign language instruction, as recommended by Ratnawulan *et al.* (2021), to ensure more inclusive and effective service delivery. Additionally, revising the circular to require dedicated counsellors without teaching responsibilities would address the issue of multiple roles, aligning with MoEST's (2023) commitment to strengthen the GCSs in schools.

Resource constraints could be tackled by allocating specific budgets for counselling infrastructure, such as dedicated rooms and adaptive furniture, as suggested by Milambo (2018). The issue of gender imbalance underscores the need for stricter enforcement of the circular's requirement for both male and female teacher-counsellors in coeducational schools. Regular audits and monitoring mechanisms should be implemented to ensure compliance and promote gender-sensitive counselling practices. Furthermore, integrating universal design principles into school construction policies, as advocated by UNESCO (2018), would improve accessibility in counselling spaces.

This study employed a small sample size, consisting of 32 participants, including three school heads, five teacher-counsellors, and 24 students with disabilities from three inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam. The limited scope of this study may not adequately represent the full range of experiences in inclusive schools across Tanzania. By focusing exclusively on urban schools within a single region, the research overlooks the distinct challenges faced by schools in rural and other urban settings. Moreover, while the qualitative approach provided valuable, in-depth insights, it lacked quantitative data that could capture the extent of key issues, such as the frequency of counselling sessions or the counsellor-to-student ratio. To address these limitations, future research

should adopt a more comprehensive design that includes a larger and more diverse sample, incorporates rural schools, and employs a mixed-methods approach. This would enhance the generalisability of the findings and offer a more nuanced and holistic understanding of guidance and counselling services for students with disabilities.

Conclusions and recommendations

Extensive literature review highlights the importance of guidance and counselling in helping students accept disabilities and access individualised support. However, the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in inclusive secondary schools in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is hindered by various challenges, including lack of training on the part of teacher-counsellors, resource constraints, communication barriers, multiple roles, lack of safe counselling spaces, and gender imbalance. Teacher-counsellors employed strategies such as outdoor sessions, engaging specialised teachers, elderly female teachers, and peer assistance to address these issues; however, systemic barriers, such as confidentiality risks and inaccessible facilities, limited their effectiveness. These findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions to enhance GCSs and support SwDs' educational experiences.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government allocate funds to establish dedicated counselling rooms equipped with accessible furniture, as stipulated in Education Circular No. 11 of 2002. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) should implement regular in-service training focused on disability-specific counselling, including sign language, to equip teacher-counsellors with the necessary skills. Schools must also ensure the presence of both male and female counsellors to enhance student comfort and address gender-sensitive issues. Additionally, reducing the teaching loads of teacher-counsellors—as outlined in Education Circular No. 11 of 2002—would allow them to dedicate more time and attention to guidance and counselling services. Partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can play a critical role in supporting infrastructure improvements, while online platforms present a cost-effective solution for delivering ongoing professional development and training. Lastly, schools should implement awareness campaigns to educate staff and students without disabilities about the challenges faced by students with disabilities. This would enhance a more inclusive culture that supports effective guidance and counselling services.

References

- Adaka, T. A., Chia, J. T., & Tarka, V. S. (2024). Educational counselling needs of students with disabilities in Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Research in Developing Areas*, 5(3): 336–347.
- Aloteabi, Y. H. (2018). An investigation into the perceptions of school counsellors in relation to providing counselling for students with special needs in Saudi Arabia schools [Doctoral dissertation], University of Nottingham.
- Bakar, A. Y. A., Ahmad, S. N., & Mahmud, M. I. (2019). School guidance and counselling services for special education students in Malaysia: A literature review. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 5(6): 421–430. Retrieved from https://www.ijicc.net/images/vol5iss6/5647_Bakar_2019_E.R.pdf
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 77–101.

- Chikopela, R., Mandyata, J. M., Ndhlovu, D. & Mpolomoka, D. L. (2019). Counselling HIV and AIDS learners with hearing impairment: Gaps in practice in Lusaka's secondary schools, Zambia. *European Journal of Special Education Research*, 4(1): 87-105.
- Harris, B. (2013). *International secondary based counselling: Scoping report U.S.A* Mind Ed.
- Kahveci, G. & Küçük, F. (2016). School counselling and students with disabilities. *International Online Journal of Primary Education*, 5(2): 15-21. Retrieved from <http://www.iojpe.org>
- Majoko, T. (2013). Challenges in school guidance and counselling services provisions for children with disabilities in Zimbabwean inclusive primary schools [PhD Thesis], University of South Africa.
- Mgumba, B. F. (2021). The status of counselling services for students with visual impairments in Tanzanian universities. *Journal of Humanities & Social Science (JHSS)*, 10(5). <https://doi.org/10.56279/jhss.v10i5.107>
- Milambo, P. (2018). Students and teachers' perception of guidance and counselling services in Zambia: Case study of secondary and primary schools in Kafue, Lusaka [Master's dissertation], Matem University.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). (1995). *Education and training policy*. Government Printer.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). (2002). *Waraka wa elimu na. 11 wa mwaka 2002: Kuanzisha huduma za malezi na ushauri nasaha kwa wanafunzi katika shule na vyuo vya ualimu* [Education circular No. 11 of 2002: Establishment of guidance and counselling services for students in schools and teacher training colleges].
- Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT). (2014). *Education and training policy*. Government Printer.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). (2020). *National basic statistics in Tanzania (BEST)*. Government Printer.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). (2023). *Education and training policy 2014, revised edition 2023*. <https://www.moe.go.tz/sw/habari/sera-ya-elimu-na-mafunzo-2014-toleo-la-mwaka-2023>.
- Murugami, M. W. & Nel, N. M. (2012). A developmental career guidance and counselling process for learners with disabilities: Preparation for employment, *International Research Journals*, 3(4): 362-370.
- Ntilisinda, J. W. (2017). The effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in facilitating learning among secondary school students in Tanzania: A case study of Dodoma municipality [Master's Dissertation], University of Dodoma.
- Ocansey, M. E., & Gyimah, E. K. (2016). A study of guidance and counselling needs of learners with exceptional educational needs and disabilities in Ghana. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(6): 1281-1291.
- Oluka, B. N., & Egbo, J. E. (2014). Inclusive education programmes: Challenges and roles of guidance counsellors. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research (JEPER)*, 1(3): 40-44.
- Owusu, G. A., Dramanu, T., Nyarko, E. K., & Opuku, R. (2018). The role of guidance and counselling services in the academic achievement of students in senior high schools in the Kwahu South District, Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(25): 31-38.
- Pearson, M. & Wilson, H. (2012). Soothing spaces and healing places: Is there an ideal counselling room design? *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 18(3): 46-53.

- Ratnawulan, T., Sulistyorini, I. W. Eka Yuli Astuti, E. Y., Novianti, R., Ayundhari, V. L. Ayi Najmul Hidayat, A. N., Septiana, F. I., & Nurrohman, Y. A. (2021). Positive parenting of early years downsyndrome children through guidance program and client centered counseling model. *Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing*, 5(3): 1494–1499.
- Rushahu, B. E. (2017). The provision of guidance and counselling services to students with disabilities in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(18): 1–8.
- Swedberg, R. (2018). *On the Uses of Exploratory Research and Exploratory Studies in Social Science*, Cornell University: Department of Sociology.
- Tanzania Education Network/Mtandao wa Elimu Tanzania (TEN/MET). (2021). Annual Report: July 2020 – June 2021. Dar es Salaam: TEN/MET. Retrieved from https://tenmet.or.tz/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TenMET-2020_2021-Annual-Report-Final-Online.pdf
- Wambeti, N. & Mwenda, K. J. (2016). Rethinking school guidance and counselling in Kenya: Addressing student needs effectively in secondary schools. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 4(12): 253–264.
- UNESCO (2018). *Making technical and vocational training work for women and vulnerable students in Malawi: Improving access and success*. UNESCO.
- Zimba, V. & Changala, M. (2018). The status of guidance and counselling in selected primary schools in Lilanda Zone, Lusaka District, Zambia. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*, 2(3): 27–39.