

The Role of School Guidance and Counselling Services in Students Behavioral Adjustment: A Study in Tamil-Medium Schools of the Colombo Central Educational Zone Sri Lanka

M.F.F Ziara

Faculty of Education, University of Colombo

Dr. V. Vijayabaskar

Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna

Abstract

Behavioral problems among students are increasingly recognized as significant challenges in the current educational system. School guidance and counseling services play a crucial role in managing these behaviors and promoting students' social and academic development. This study aimed to examine the role of school guidance and counseling services in students' behavioral adjustment in Tamil-medium schools within the Colombo Central Education Zone. Specifically, it investigated the operational status of the services, their relationship with students' behavioral adjustment, and the impact of different service components on behavioral dimensions. Embedded mixed-method research approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques, was employed. The study population consisted of students participating in guidance and counseling services in the targeted schools, with a sample of 80 students selected using purposive sampling. Additionally, 8 counselors and 8 principals were included as key informants. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and analyzed using statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The findings revealed that students held moderately positive perceptions of guidance and counseling services. Among service components, counselor qualification received the highest mean score ($M = 3.78$). Regarding behavioral adjustment dimensions, interpersonal relationships scored highest

($M = 4.18$), while self-management scored lowest ($M = 3.41$). A moderate positive correlation ($r = .506$, $p < .001$) was observed between overall guidance and counseling services and students' behavioral adjustment. Further, facilities provided for counseling ($\beta = .32$, $p = .015$) and counselor qualification ($\beta = .28$, $p = .046$) emerged as significant predictors, collectively explaining 31% of the variance in behavioral adjustment. The study concludes that school guidance and counseling services significantly influence students' behavioral adjustment. Moreover, the dual role of the counselor and the time limitations for counseling sessions have an impact on the behavior of students. In its fundamental, guidance counseling services have a significant impact on the behavior of students, Services delivered by qualified counselors with adequate facilities yield better outcomes. Consequently, it is essential to enhance counseling infrastructure, ensure counselor qualification and competence, and implement programs to improve students' self-management skills. Strengthening infrastructure, professional training, and administrative support are essential steps toward improving counselling service effectiveness in Sri Lankan schools.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Behavioural Adjustment, Tamil-medium Schools, Colombo Central Division, Student Development

Introduction

In the modern world, students face numerous psychological, social, and behavioural challenges due to rapid changes in social structures, economic conditions, technological advancements, and family dynamics. These challenges significantly impact their academic performance and overall development. Research by Arshad (2022) highlights that such issues affect students' learning activities and make achieving quality educational outcomes difficult. Senavirathna (2018) further notes that these challenges lead to various behavioural problems among students. Behaviour correction refers to the process of improving students' appropriate social skills, emotional regulation, and the promotion of positive behaviour within the school environment (Whiston & Sexton, 2018). Education aims at the holistic development of an individual physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Guidance and counselling services support this goal by helping individuals correct harmful personal traits and express appropriate behaviour. Thus, education and guidance and counselling are seen as inseparable (Arunthathi, 2012). School guidance and counselling aims to help students understand themselves, make informed decisions, and plan their future goals. Counsellors serve as service providers in this regard (Agatha et al., 2022). Several previous studies confirm that school guidance and counselling is an indispensable service in the current educational framework.

Background of the Study

The Tamil-medium schools in the Central Educational Zone of Colombo were selected as the research area. There are 18 Tamil-medium schools in this zone, of which 8 provide guidance and counselling services. Behavioural problems among students are identified as a major challenge in educational systems worldwide (Liyanage & Hettiarachchi, 2017). To address these challenges, school guidance and counselling services were officially established in government schools in Sri Lanka in 2013, through Circular 06/2013 (Udeshini, 2024). Buddhiprabha (2016) noted that common issues in Sri Lankan government schools include learning difficulties, examination stress, psychological problems, bullying, disciplinary issues, school dropouts, and

family-related problems such as domestic violence and the absence of parents due to overseas employment. The Central Colombo population is diverse in its social and economic characteristics. Factors such as socioeconomic disparities, cultural influences, family situations, and academic pressures contribute to behavioural problems among students (Jayaweera & Fernando, 2018). Students from low-income families face additional pressures unstable environments, limited access to resources, and parental pressure to contribute to household income all of which increase behavioural challenges (De Silva, 2019). Perera (2009) reported that one in five school-going adolescents in Sri Lanka (18.9%) shows signs of psychological disorders. The Ministry of Education's Research Report (2020) noted that approximately 30% of students have moved from moderate to severe psychological stress due to academic and social pressures. A study by the Colombo Central Education Office found that disciplinary problems among students increased by 15% over the past two years, underscoring the urgent need for effective intervention. Research confirms that schools with strong guidance and counselling programmes show lower rates of behavioural problems and higher levels of student satisfaction (Whiston & Sexton, 2018). Therefore, investigating the impact of school guidance and counselling services in this region became a clear necessity.

Research Problem

Although behavioural problems among students in Tamil-medium schools of the Colombo Central Zone have been identified, the specific role of guidance and counselling services in addressing these issues remains unclear. Common behavioural issues observed include absenteeism, substance abuse, emotional difficulties, stubbornness, and bullying (De Silva & Jayasinghe, 2017). Senavirathna & Baker (2018) emphasize the urgent need for effective guidance and counselling in schools. Previous studies including those by Senavirathna (2018), Wasantha (2016),

and Udeshini (2023) have pointed out that guidance and counselling services in Sri Lankan schools are not functioning effectively due to lack of qualified counsellors, inadequate training, and negative student attitudes toward counselling. Since guidance and counselling in Sri Lanka is still in a developing stage (Buddhiprabha & Pathirana, 2017), and since Tamil-medium schools possess unique regional, ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic characteristics, findings from other contexts may not be directly applicable here.

Objectives and Research Questions

The main objective is to identify the role of school guidance and counselling services in correcting student behaviour in Tamil-medium schools of the Colombo Central Educational Zone. The study specifically aims to assess the current status of these services, examine the relationship between counselling services and behavioural adjustment, and evaluate the impact of various components of counselling on students' behavioural dimensions.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design combining embedded mixed method research approaches to examine the role of school guidance counselling services in student behavioral adjustment among Tamil-medium government schools in the Colombo Central Education Zone. The study sample comprised 80 students who were enrolled in counselling selected through purposive sampling for the quantitative component, and 8 students, counsellors and principals selected for the qualitative component (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). A structured questionnaire based on the CASEL (2020) framework measured five guidance counselling variables and five behavioural adjustment dimensions using a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with counsellors and principals to explore experiences and challenges related to counselling services. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, ANOVA, and t-tests. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Literature review

The role of school guidance and counseling services in regulating student behavior can be viewed through the theory of social emotional learning (SEL). Social Emotional Learning Theory (SEL) The framework, introduced by CASEL in 1994 through Daniel Goleman and Eileen Rockefeller Goleman, is built on contributions from scholars including Comer, Goleman, Bandura, and Vygotsky (Tiffany, 2023). It identifies five core competencies essential for student behavioral adjustment:

- Self-Awareness – recognizing personal emotions, strengths, and weaknesses (Goleman, 2017)
 - Self-Management – regulating emotions and achieving goals (CASEL, 2020)
 - Interpersonal Relationships – building positive connections with peers and teachers (Wentzel & Caldwell, 2019)
 - Responsible Decision-Making – making ethical, value-based choices (Bandura, 2018)
 - Social Awareness – understanding others' emotions and cultural contexts (Weissberg, 2016) . School guidance counselling services utilise SEL principles to develop students' emotional-social skills, improving behaviour and academic outcomes (Elizabeth et al., 2019; Durlak et al., 2011).
- Cognitive Behavior Theory (CBT) Developed by Albert Ellis and Aaron T. Beck in the 1960s, CBT holds that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected (Kim, 2021). Negative thinking patterns produce emotional difficulties and deviant behavior. By restructuring faulty beliefs through counselling, students develop improved conduct, self-confidence, responsibility, and healthy relationships.

Behaviour Adjustment and Its Importance

In the modern world, students face various psychological and social problems due to changes in social, economic, technological, and family structures, affecting their learning activities and making quality educational outcomes difficult to achieve (Arshad, 2022). These behavioral problems not only disrupt learning but also cause long-term negative consequences in educational activities (Kearny, 2008), and inappropriate

behavioral problems further lead to various disciplinary issues (Senavirathna, 2018). Behavioral adjustment refers to improving students' appropriate social skills, regulating emotions, and implementing methods to express positive behaviors in school (Meyor & Suldo, 2011). According to Santrock (2020), it encompasses emotional regulation, sense of responsibility, maintaining positive peer relationships, and conforming to school social norms. Effective school guidance counselling plays a significant role in behaviour modification by providing emotional support and coping strategies (Lapan et al., 2007).

Observed Behavioural Problems among Sri Lankan School Students

Research has identified various behavioural problems among Sri Lankan school students. In government schools, learning difficulties, examination stress, bullying, psychological problems, disciplinary issues, school dropout, family violence, and lack of contact with mothers working abroad have been commonly observed (Buddhiprabha, 2016). Additionally, excessive workload, inattention, video game addiction, isolation, and conflicts with parents and peers have been identified (Buddhiprabha, 2017). In central Colombo schools, absenteeism, substance abuse, emotional problems, stubbornness, and bullying are common (Silva & Jayasinghe, 2017). Research indicates that one in five Sri Lankan adolescent students (18.9%) shows signs of psychological problems (Perera, 2009), and approximately 30% of students face moderate to severe psychological stress due to academic pressures and social interactions (Ministry of Education Research Report, 2020). Disciplinary problems have further increased by 15% over the last two years (Central Colombo Education Office). Rupananda et al. (2024) found that bullying, particularly verbal bullying, is widely prevalent among Sri Lankan school students, recommending that mental health support programmes be strengthened through school guidance counselling services.

School Guidance Counselling Services and Their Importance

School guidance and counselling services have played an important role in student

personality development over past decades, beginning in the 1950s and now forming a structured framework (Gysbers & Henderson, 2014). In Sri Lanka, between 2008 and 2013, these services were formally established (MOE Sri Lanka, 2017). The Ministry of Education introduced the National Policy on School Counselling through Circular 06/2013, creating procedures for students to manage stress, challenges, and examination anxiety (MOE, 2013; Udeshini, 2024). Jayawardena & Gamage (2022) found that students receiving counselling generally show improvements in attendance, learning methods, and physical and mental health, though structural challenges including confidentiality breaches, social stigma, and dual counsellor roles were identified. Jayasekara (2024) further noted that while counselled students showed behavioural and academic improvements, the service has not been fully implemented nationally due to limitations in counsellor qualifications and resources.

Counselling helps students develop learning plans, select appropriate subjects, and choose suitable educational institutions, while stimulating learning skills and resolving school problems (Hansi & Wasantha, 2021). It provides an opportunity for individuals to examine and clarify themselves in order to live satisfactorily and effectively (IRTAC, 2023). School guidance counselling assists students in self-discovery, decision-making, and planning future goals (Agatha et al., 2022). In the 21st century, as students face complex problems in a rapidly advancing technological era, guidance counselling services have become essential (Senavirathna & Baker, 2018; Adekola & Islamiyyah, 2023). Positive behaviour change through counselling develops self-awareness, self-discipline, and responsibility among students (Okta et al., 2022), and school guidance counselling is considered indispensable for managing the ethical conduct of all members of society (Victor, Owen & Kimani, 2016).

Impact of School Guidance Counselling on Student Behavioral Adjustment

School guidance counselling plays a significant role in student behaviour adjustment (Okta et al., 2022), improving students' academic, social, emotional, and personal skills to create a well-rounded individual (Darakhshan & Shameem, 2023). Amutha et al. (2021) found that school guidance counselling identifies individual strengths and capabilities to correct inappropriate behaviours. Students who received counselling interventions showed reductions in aggressive behaviour and improvements in skills (Silva & Jayasinghe, 2017), and schools with strong counselling programmes show lower behavioural difficulties and greater student satisfaction (Whiston & Sexton, 2018). Various counselling approaches help identify and change students' negative thinking patterns and reduce deviant behavioural problems (Boyard, 2020). Regarding student participation, frequent participants in counselling show fewer disciplinary problems and greater classroom engagement compared to non-participants (Sink & Stroh, 2003; Adekola & Islamiyyah, 2023). However, in Sri Lanka, students' awareness and trust in school counsellors remains low, resulting in low participation rates (Jayawardena & Dissanayake, 2017). Participation is most effective when students, parents, and educators collaborate (Bryan et al., 2012), and confidentiality significantly encourages students to share their problems openly (Low & Siegel, 2020). Concerning counselling interventions, 48% of students consider guidance counselling interventions the best solution for their problems (Hansi & Wasantha, 2021). Individual counselling, group counselling, awareness programmes, and positive behaviour plans contribute to various aspects of student development (Udayakumari, 2022). Group counselling has been found to significantly reduce aggressive and deviant behaviour (Adekola & Islamiyyah, 2023), and counsellor competency plays a notable role in determining intervention outcomes (Allen & Bloom, 2019). The counsellor-student relationship is considered the foundation of successful counselling. Carl Rogers' concept of "therapeutic alliance" enables students to gain inner strength to face problems directly when counsellors show genuine concern. Trust between counsellor and student

improves mental wellbeing, self-confidence, and social functioning (Cooper & Mcleod, 2011). Cultural sensitivity must be respected in counselling relationships (Sue & Sue, 2012), and in the Sri Lankan context, appropriate communication methods and confidentiality are essential as many students perceive counsellors as authority figures (Jayawardena & Dissanayake, 2017). Counsellor competency is largely determined by educational qualifications, professional training, and personal skills (Geldard, Geldard & Foo, 2018). Research found that counsellors in many Sri Lankan government schools lack broad counselling training and specialized psychological assessment skills (Wijetunge & Fonseka, 2019). Reupert et al. (2021) recommend a minimum of 600 hours of direct client contact, and investment in national certification processes for school counsellors is strongly recommended (Perera & Ranasinghe, 2022). Regarding facility provision, physical infrastructure, trained personnel, technological support, and dedicated time slots are indispensable for effective counselling (Owens et al., 2020).

Sri Lanka's counsellor-to-student ratio of approximately 1:1,000–1,500 far exceeds the global recommended ratio of 1:250 (UNESCO, 2018). Psychological assessment tools and referral monitoring software are not being utilised in schools (Reupert et al., 2021), and many counsellors serving simultaneously as teachers lack dedicated counselling time (Perera & Ranasinghe, 2022). Significant challenges include insufficient qualified counsellors (Buddhiprabha, 2016), limited resources, absence of special training, and cultural stigma around mental health (Silva & Jayasinghe, 2021). Research in central and north-central provinces identified improper functioning of services, absence of professionally trained staff, and inadequate infrastructure (Senevirathan, 2018). Despite policy directives, counselling services are not functioning effectively (Udeshini, 2023), with shame, doubts about effectiveness, and inappropriate settings preventing students from approaching services. Students have indicated that counselling is not at a professional level (Thabrew & Chamari, 2016), highlighting the urgent need for greater investment. Based on the literature review, student behavioral adjustment

encompasses five dimensions self-awareness, self-management, interpersonal relationships, responsible decision-making, and social awareness grounded in SEL and CBT frameworks. School guidance counselling services are evaluated through five corresponding dimensions, service participation, counselling interventions, counsellor-student relationship, counsellor competency, and facility provision (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Okta et al., 2022). The study examines the relationship between these independent and dependent variables

as illustrated in the conceptual framework.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of sample characteristics and response distributions across study variables. All items fall within the mean range of 2.71 to 4.00, indicating that students generally perceive guidance and counselling services and behavioral adjustment positively. Guidance and Counselling Variables were measured using five constructs.

N		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
GCP_SUM	80	1.00	5.00	3.2656	.74454
GCI_SUM	80	2.00	5.00	3.4969	.58663
CSI_SUM	80	1.50	5.00	3.5562	.78452
CQF_SUM	80	1.00	5.00	3.7844	.69097
GCF_SUM	80	1.00	5.00	3.4344	.84732
Valid (listwise)	N 80				

Guidance Counselling Participation (GCP) recorded a mean of 3.266, reflecting moderate participation. While students are aware of and access counselling services, involvement may be limited due to stigma, time constraints, or lack of motivation, suggesting a need for proactive engagement strategies such as awareness campaigns and peer-led programmes (Schaefer & Borduin, 2005; White & Freeman, 2005). Guidance Counselling Intervention (GCI) recorded a mean of 3.497, indicating moderate to high intervention levels, consistent with literature emphasizing structured interventions for student wellbeing (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Counsellor-Student Interaction (CSI) recorded a mean of 3.556,

reflecting moderate to high positive interaction, with quality depending on counsellor approach, student openness, and session frequency . Counsellor Qualification (CQF) recorded the highest mean of 3.784, suggesting students perceive counsellors as professionally competent and capable of applying evidence-based practices and ethical standards (Erford, 2010; Borders & Drury, 1992). Guidance Counselling Facilitation (GCF) recorded a mean of 3.434, indicating moderate facilitation, with limitations potentially including inadequate counselling rooms, insufficient materials, or limited scheduling flexibility (ASCA, 2012).

N		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SAW_SUM	80	1.75	5.00	3.8469	.73723
SMT_SUM	80	1.00	4.75	3.4125	.72599
IPR_SUM	80	2.50	5.00	4.1813	.58187
MRD_SUM	80	1.00	5.00	3.8375	.79466
SOA_SUM	80	3.00	5.00	4.0875	.48408
Valid (listwise)	N 80				

Student Behavioral Adjustment Variables were assessed across five dimensions. Self-

Awareness (SAW) recorded a high mean of 3.847, indicating students understand their

emotions, strengths, and limitations, contributing to positive behavioral outcomes . Self-Management (SMT) recorded a moderate mean of 3.413, suggesting students possess some emotional regulation but may still struggle with impulse control, a skill requiring structured counselling support (Zimmerman, 2000). Interpersonal Relationship (IPR) recorded a very high mean of 4.181, demonstrating strong social competence and positive peer relationships

essential for academic success and emotional wellbeing. Making Responsible Decisions (MRD) recorded a high mean of 3.838, indicating students are capable of thoughtful, ethical decision-making crucial for behavioral adjustment (Dweck, 2006). Social Awareness (SOA) recorded the highest mean of 4.088, reflecting strong empathy and understanding of social diversity, contributing to a positive school climate and reduced behavioural conflicts (Cohen et al., 2009).

Correlations			
GCSIV_SUM		SBADV_SUM	
GCSIV_SUM	Pearson Correlation	1	.506**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
SBADV_SUM	Pearson Correlation	.506**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis examined relationships between guidance and counselling variables and student behavioral adjustment using Pearson correlation coefficients. The composite correlation between guidance counselling services (GCSIV_SUM) and student behavioral adjustment (SBADV_SUM) was $r = 0.506$, $p < 0.01$, indicating a moderate and significant positive relationship, consistent with theoretical frameworks positing that counselling services enhance emotional and social functioning (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). The moderate correlation implies that while guidance and counselling are important contributors,

behavioral adjustment is also influenced by family environment, peer relationships, school climate, and individual personality (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Among specific constructs, Counsellor Qualification ($r = 0.451$, $p < 0.01$) and Guidance Counselling Facilitation ($r = 0.455$, $p < 0.01$) showed the strongest relationships with behavioral adjustment, followed by Counsellor-Student Interaction ($r = 0.309$, $p < 0.01$), Guidance Counselling Participation ($r = 0.377$, $p < 0.01$), and Counselling Intervention ($r = 0.267$, $p < 0.05$). These findings support previous research indicating that counselling effectiveness is driven by counsellor competence and programme quality (Erford, 2010; Borders & Drury, 1992).

Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.557 ^a	.310	.263	.40814

a. Predictors: (Constant), GCF_SUM, GCI_SUM, CQF_SUM, GCP_SUM, CSI_SUM

Multiple regression analysis determined the predictive power of guidance and counselling variables on student behavioral adjustment. The model yielded $R = 0.557$, $R^2 = 0.310$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.263$, indicating that the

combined guidance and counselling variables explain 31% of the variance in behavioral adjustment. The ANOVA confirmed model significance with $F(5, 74) = 6.643$, $p < 0.001$.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.208	.339		6.504	.000
	GCP_SUM	.095	.081	.148	1.165	.248
	GCI_SUM	.109	.097	.135	1.132	.261
	CSI_SUM	-.100	.084	-.164	-1.182	.241
	CQF_SUM	.189	.093	.275	2.030	.046
	GCF_SUM	.178	.072	.317	2.479	.015

a. Dependent Variable: SBADV_SUM

Among the predictors, Counsellor Qualification (CQF) ($\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.046$) and Guidance Counselling Facilitation (GCF) ($\beta = 0.317$, $p = 0.015$) emerged as the only statistically significant predictors. Qualified counsellors are more likely to implement effective strategies including cognitive-behavioral techniques, social skills training, and career guidance (Erford, 2010), while well-facilitated services ensure accessible, confidential, and institutionally supported counselling environments (ASCA, 2012). Participation, intervention, and counsellor-student interaction were not significant predictors in the regression model, suggesting their influence may be indirect or mediated by other factors such as session consistency, depth of relationship, and broader school environment support (Cohen et al., 2009). One-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences in behavioral adjustment across student groups, $F(4, 75) = 1.723$, $p = 0.154$, suggesting consistency in behavioral adjustment across different student categories due to similar exposure to counselling services and school environments. Self-Awareness and Social Awareness showed marginal trends approaching significance, which may become notable with larger sample sizes. Independent samples t-test similarly found no significant gender

differences in behavioral adjustment ($t(78) = -0.267$, $p = 0.790$), with male students recording a mean of 3.8595 and female students 3.8882. This indicates that counselling benefits are equally effective for both genders, consistent with literature emphasizing that counselling effectiveness depends on quality and accessibility rather than gender (Sue & Sue, 2012; Ratts et al., 2015). Thematic analysis was conducted using interview data collected from three groups students, school counsellors, and principals to examine the role of school guidance counselling services in student behavioral adjustment. Counsellor Qualification ($M = 3.784$, $\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.046$) emerged as a significant predictor, qualitatively confirmed by students describing counsellors as trustworthy and non-judgmental, stating *"when speaking with the counsellor I felt very safe."* Principals (42%) identified lack of advanced training as the most critical gap, supporting qualification as a key determinant of behavioral outcomes (Geldard & Foo, 2018). Guidance Counselling Facilitation ($\beta = 0.317$, $p = 0.015$) was the strongest predictor, powerfully confirmed where 62.5% of principals and 50% of students identified absence of dedicated counselling rooms as major barriers. Students reported *"there is no*

designated place for counselling in our school," directly confirming inadequate facilities undermine service effectiveness (Senaviratna, 2018).

Counsellor-Student Interaction ($M = 3.556$, $r = 0.309$) showed a moderate positive correlation, supported qualitatively where 50% of students valued trust and confidentiality, though counsellors' dual roles explained its non-significance as a regression predictor. Students **expressed "when speaking with the counsellor I felt very safe; I believed my matters would not be told to anyone else,"** confirming that the quality of interaction is central to behavioral adjustment, as indicated quantitatively. Participation ($M = 3.266$) remained moderate and non-significant, explained qualitatively through time constraints and privacy concerns, with students reporting **"due to time constraints, counselling sessions were reduced"**.

Regarding behavioral dimensions, very high interpersonal relationship ($M = 4.181$) and social awareness ($M = 4.088$) scores were validated by students reporting improved friendships and empathy. High self-awareness ($M = 3.847$) and responsible decision-making ($M = 3.838$) were confirmed by students stating **"I learned about my strengths and weaknesses" and "I now think about future consequences."** Moderate self-management ($M = 3.413$) was confirmed by students acknowledging **"it is still difficult to control anger"**. The overall correlation ($r = 0.506$, $p < 0.01$) and regression ($R^2 = 0.310$) were consistently supported across all three qualitative groups, confirming that guidance counselling services meaningfully contribute to student behavioral adjustment in schools.

Findings

- Students moderately participate ($M = 3.27$) in school guidance counselling services, with participation levels influenced by stigma, time constraints, and lack of awareness. The frequency of sessions showed low participation levels ($M = 2.7$). This highlights the need for adequate time to be allocated for sufficient counselling sessions for students.
- Counselling interventions ($M = 3.50$) are at a moderate to high level, reflecting fairly active and structured service delivery in schools. Individual counselling sessions ($M = 2.82$) showed lower participation levels compared to group counselling

sessions ($M = 3.4$).

- Counsellor-student interaction ($M = 3.56$) is perceived moderately positive by students, though quality varies depending on counsellor approach and session frequency.
- Counsellor qualification is the highest-rated ($M = 3.99$) construct among guidance and counselling variables, indicating students perceive counsellors as professionally competent.
- Guidance counselling facilitation remains at a moderate level ($M = 3.56$), suggesting limitations in physical infrastructure ($M = 2.93$), time allocation, and administrative support.
- Students demonstrate very high levels of interpersonal relationships and social awareness, reflecting strong social competence.
- Self-awareness and responsible decision-making are at high levels, indicating students understand their emotions and make thoughtful choices.
- Self-management remains at a moderate level ($M = 3.41$), suggesting students still face challenges in impulse control and emotional regulation.
- There is a moderate and significant positive relationship between guidance counselling services and student behavioral adjustment ($r = 0.506$, $p < 0.01$).
- Counsellor qualification and facility provision show the strongest correlations with behavioral adjustment among all counselling constructs.
- All five guidance and counselling constructs are positively related to student behavioral adjustment.
- Guidance and counselling services collectively explain 31% of the variance in student behavioral adjustment.
- Counsellor qualification is a significant predictor of student behavioral adjustment ($\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.046$).
- Guidance counselling facilitation is a significant predictor of student behavioral adjustment ($\beta = 0.317$, $p = 0.015$).
- Participation, intervention, and counsellor-student interaction are not significant predictors when combined with other variables in the regression

model.

- There are no statistically significant differences in behavioral adjustment across different student groups.
- There are no statistically significant gender differences in behavioral adjustment between male and female students.
- Counselling benefits are consistent and equitable across all student categories regardless of gender or group.
- 45% of students reported strengthened ethical values, accountability, and critical thinking following counselling.
- 33% of students reported reduced anger and emotional confusion after participating in counselling sessions.
- Privacy deficiency is the most significant barrier to accessing counselling services, reported by 50% of students.
- Time constraints and resource inadequacy prevent students from fully engaging in counselling sessions.
- Students showed notable improvements in self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and social communication skills following counselling.
- 43% of counsellors identified lack of advanced training and certification as the most critical professional gap.
- Excessive workload is the most prominent challenge faced by counsellors, with one counsellor managing hundreds of students.
- Absence of dedicated counselling rooms significantly undermines service confidentiality and student trust.
- Collaboration among teachers, parents, and school administration is essential for effective counselling service delivery.
- Counsellors unanimously recognize the importance of their role but are constrained by inadequate resources, time, and administrative support.
- Principals identified emotional regulation and behavioral adjustment as the most prominent positive outcomes of counselling.
- 62.5% of principals noted the absence of dedicated counselling rooms as a major infrastructure challenge.
- 45% of principals recommended continuous professional training for counsellors as the most critical improvement needed.
- Principals recommended regular and consistent counselling sessions, at least weekly or fortnightly, for sustained student behavioral adjustment.
- Parental participation in counselling programmes is essential for long-term behavioral outcomes, as recommended by 25% of principals.
- Both quantitative and qualitative findings confirm that guidance counselling services positively influence student behavioral adjustment.
- Counsellor qualification and facility provision are the most critical determinants of effective counselling outcomes.
- Dual roles of counsellors serving simultaneously as teachers significantly reduce the quality and consistency of counselling services.
- School guidance counselling services develop students into emotionally balanced, socially responsible, and future-ready individuals.
- Strengthening infrastructure, professional training, and administrative support are essential steps toward improving counselling service effectiveness in Sri Lankan schools.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study confirms that guidance and counselling services significantly influence student behavioral adjustment, with a moderate positive correlation of $r = 0.506$. Counsellor qualification and facilitation are the key predictors of positive behavioral outcomes, underscoring the need for schools to prioritize hiring qualified counsellors, providing continuous professional development, and ensuring adequate counselling infrastructure and institutional support. Educational policymakers should allocate resources for counselling services and establish national standards to ensure quality and consistency across schools (Borders & Drury, 1992; Erford, 2010). The study supports the theoretical premise that guidance and counselling promote self-awareness, social skills, and emotional regulation as dimensions of behavioral adjustment, while affirming the multi-dimensional nature of behavior as influenced by individual, social, and environmental factors. The absence of significant group and gender differences confirms that counselling benefits are consistent across all student categories.

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