



# Impact of educators' perceptions on the guidance and counselling programme: A case of Hwange urban secondary school

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study examines the impact of educators' perceptions on the effectiveness of the Guidance and Counselling (G&C) programme in Hwange Urban secondary schools. The objectives were to explore teachers' attitudes toward G&C, determine how their perceptions influence programme implementation, and identify factors that facilitate or hinder successful delivery.

**Method** – A qualitative research design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis to collect in-depth data. The sample consisted of 20 participants, selected purposively: 12 teachers, 4 school counsellors, and 4 school administrators.

**Result** – Findings revealed that while educators generally acknowledge the importance of G&C in promoting learners' academic, social, and emotional well-being, inconsistent understanding of the programme, limited training, heavy workloads, and inadequate resources significantly impede effective implementation. Positive perceptions were associated with greater commitment, wider integration of G&C activities, and stronger support for learners.

**Implication** – The study highlights the need for targeted professional development, institutional support, and policy reinforcement to enhance educators' confidence and participation in G&C.

**Originality/Value** – The originality of this article lies in its contextualised exploration of educators' perceptions within a Zimbabwean urban setting, offering insights that can inform programme strengthening, policy formulation, and future research on school-based counselling services.

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**Kata Kunci:**

Persepsi pendidik, program bimbingan dan konseling, Hwange urban, implementasi program, sekolah menengah.

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**Abstract**

**Tujuan** – Studi ini mengkaji dampak persepsi pendidik terhadap efektivitas program Bimbingan dan Konseling (B&K) di sekolah menengah perkotaan Hwange. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi sikap guru terhadap B&K, menentukan bagaimana persepsi mereka memengaruhi implementasi program, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memfasilitasi atau menghambat pelaksanaan program yang sukses.

**Metode** – Desain penelitian kualitatif digunakan, dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur dan analisis dokumen untuk mengumpulkan data mendalam. Sampel terdiri dari 20 peserta yang dipilih secara purposif: 12 guru, 4 konselor sekolah, dan 4 administrator sekolah.

**Hasil** – Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun pendidik umumnya mengakui pentingnya G&C dalam mempromosikan kesejahteraan akademik, sosial, dan emosional siswa, pemahaman yang tidak konsisten tentang program, pelatihan yang terbatas, beban kerja yang berat, dan sumber daya yang tidak memadai secara signifikan menghambat implementasi yang efektif. Persepsi positif terkait dengan komitmen yang lebih besar, integrasi yang lebih luas dari aktivitas G&C, dan dukungan yang lebih kuat bagi siswa.

**Implikasi** – Studi ini menyoroti kebutuhan akan pengembangan profesional yang ditargetkan, dukungan institusional, dan penguatan kebijakan untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan partisipasi pendidik dalam G&C.

**Orisinalitas/Nilai** – Keaslian artikel ini terletak pada eksplorasi kontekstual persepsi pendidik dalam lingkungan perkotaan Zimbabwe, yang menawarkan wawasan untuk memperkuat program, merumuskan kebijakan, dan penelitian masa depan tentang layanan konseling berbasis sekolah.

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## **Introduction**

Guidance and counselling (G&C) in schools plays a central role in promoting learners' academic achievement, psychosocial well-being, and career readiness. Across sub-Saharan Africa, increased attention to school-based mental-health and wellbeing services has highlighted teachers as frontline actors in early identification and support for students, particularly where specialised counsellors are scarce (Banda, 2021).

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward G&C strongly shape whether and how counselling activities are integrated into everyday school life. Positive perceptions, characterised by belief in the value of counselling, perceived efficacy, and willingness to engage, are associated with proactive referral behaviour, the incorporation of socio-emotional learning into lessons, and greater collaboration with counsellors and parents. Dzingirayi (2023, supported by Mamman (2022)) highlights that a limited understanding of counselling roles, negative or indifferent attitudes, heavy workloads, and a lack of training undermine programme delivery.

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The Eswatini study of 2025 is also supported by The Marvel Secondary case study (2025), which concludes that empirical studies from the region repeatedly identify practical barriers to effective G&C implementation, including inadequate teacher training, resource constraints, competing curricular demands, and low institutional prioritisation of counselling services. These structural constraints interact with individual perceptions, leading teachers who feel under-prepared or unsupported to be less likely to view G&C as part of their professional remit, creating a feedback loop that weakens service reach and quality.

Recent research also underscores the growing demand on teachers to respond to students' mental-health needs. Post-pandemic socio-economic stressors and increased awareness of trauma-informed approaches intensify this expectation. Jurisdictions embedding trauma and wellbeing training into teacher education report improvements in teacher confidence and classroom outcomes, signalling the potential gains of targeted capacity building (Deakin University initiative, 2025).

Despite this growing literature, two gaps remain relevant to Hwange Urban Secondary School and similar contexts in Zimbabwe. First, much regional research documents challenges to G&C provision in broad terms or at national/regional scales, but there is limited up-to-date, school-level evidence linking educators' specific perceptions to measurable differences in programme implementation and student outcomes within Zimbabwean urban secondary schools. Existing Zimbabwean studies often predate recent shifts in policy, technology adoption, and socio-economic pressures, or sample counsellors and students rather than teachers' views specifically.

Second, while interventions such as short training workshops and resource allocation are recommended, there is scant contextualised research identifying which aspects of educators' perceptions (knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, role clarity) are most amenable to change through practical, school-level interventions in Hwange Urban settings. Clarifying this will help target professional development and policy measures that are feasible within constrained school budgets. Regional case studies (e.g., Eswatini, Nigeria, Ethiopia) point to common barriers but do not provide the fine-grained, locality-specific evidence needed for actionable recommendations in Hwange Urban.

This study, therefore, investigates how educators' perceptions influence the implementation and effectiveness of the Guidance and Counselling programme at Hwange Urban Secondary School. By focusing on teachers' lived attitudes and practices within a single urban school context, the research seeks to firstly, map perception-related facilitators and barriers to programme delivery, and secondly, to identify pragmatic leverage training points, leadership support, or resourcing that could strengthen school-based counselling services in Hwange and comparable Zimbabwean settings. Addressing these gaps will produce contextually relevant evidence to inform school policy, teacher in-service programming, and future research on sustainable models for G&C in resource-constrained urban schools.

Globally, the role of school-based guidance and counselling (G&C) programmes has gained increasing recognition as a critical component of holistic education supporting students' academic, social, emotional, and career development (Bhutto, Zafar & NaeemUllah, 2023). In many secondary schools, G&C contributes to improved student well-being, discipline, and connectedness to school communities (Kabarak University, Machakos University & Kisii University, 2023).

However, the effectiveness of G&C services in schools depends heavily on the perceptions, attitudes, and active involvement of educators and counsellors (Ahmad, Sewani & Khoso, 2024; Mubarak & Karim, 2022). For example, in a recent study in Karachi, Pakistan, most secondary school teachers surveyed showed supportive attitudes toward guidance and counselling. They agreed that G&C services significantly benefit students' overall welfare and future planning. Ahmad et al., (2024) concur that despite the positive attitudes, gaps remain in practical implementation

In sub-Saharan Africa, there is growing empirical work on G&C. A 2022 study in the Kaputa District of Zambia involving both teachers and learners found that negative attitudes, lack of professional training for counsellors, absence of a formal curriculum or timetable for counselling, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources impeded effective delivery of G&C services (Mushota, 2022). Similarly, a 2024 study in Sokoto, Nigeria, identified lack of trained counsellors, insufficient administrative and government support, inadequate facilities, and limited awareness as major constraints on G&C programmes in secondary schools (Sahabi, Aliyu, Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2024).

Moreover, a very recent study (2025) in the Tigray region of Ethiopia highlighted that low teacher and student awareness about counselling services, combined with counsellor incompetence and poor counselling-office conditions, significantly diminished the utilisation and effectiveness of G&C, indicating that perceived value and tangible support both matter in determining how well G&C programmes function (Tigray Secondary Schools study, 2025).

Closer to home, in Zimbabwe, a 2024 study of high schools in Mutare (urban Manicaland) found that while G&C services existed, their implementation was inconsistent. The study reported minimal professional development for counsellors, lack of regular teacher-counsellor collaboration, absence of systematic record-keeping, and limited awareness of official policy or guidelines among staff (Mapfumo & Nkoma, 2024). Such findings suggest that in many Zimbabwean urban schools, including potentially in Hwange, the structural and perceptual barriers identified elsewhere persist.

Taken together, these studies reflect a pattern. However, G&C is widely considered important; its implementation often falters due to resource constraints, weak institutional support, and

educators' and counsellors' limited training or unclear role definitions. Crucially, they also highlight that educators' perceptions of the value, purpose, and feasibility of G&C strongly influence whether programmes are implemented meaningfully.

Nevertheless, despite the proliferation of regional studies, there is limited up-to-date, context-specific research for urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe that explicitly links educators' perceptions (teachers and administrators) with the quality and consistency of G&C programme implementation. Specifically, few studies focus on urban areas like Hwange, where socio-economic conditions, resource availability, and school-community dynamics may differ from those in settings studied so far. Additionally, there is a paucity of research examining which dimensions of perception (e.g., perceived role, self-efficacy, attitude toward counselling, perceived barriers) most affect implementation knowledge that is crucial for designing workable interventions tailored to Zimbabwean schools.

Thus, the present study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how educators' perceptions influence the implementation and effectiveness of the G&C programme in an urban secondary school context, namely Hwange Urban Secondary School, offering insights that may inform policy, training, and institutional support for strengthening school-based counselling services in Zimbabwe. Despite the recognised importance of Guidance and Counselling (G&C) in promoting learners' academic, social, and emotional well-being, its implementation in many Zimbabwean secondary schools remains inconsistent and often ineffective. National policies support the integration of G&C into the school system, yet in practice, delivery is frequently weakened by limited institutional support, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of structured programmes. Central to these challenges are educators' perceptions, that is, teachers' and counsellors' attitudes, beliefs, and understanding of G&C, which significantly influence whether they prioritise, support, or meaningfully participate in the programme. At Hwange Urban Secondary School, informal reports and anecdotal evidence suggest that, while not much is being done in terms of guidance and counselling for learners.

This study is anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), both of which provide complementary lenses for understanding how educators' perceptions influence the implementation of guidance and counselling in secondary schools. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1994) posits that human development occurs within nested environmental systems, ranging from the microsystem to the macrosystem. Within the school microsystem, educators interact directly with learners, influencing their willingness to access and benefit from guidance and counselling. At the ecosystems and macrosystem levels, institutional policies, societal expectations, and cultural attitudes shape how teachers perceive their roles in supporting counselling. This framework is relevant because it underscores the multi-layered influences of the individual, institutional, and societal, thus shaping educators' perceptions in Hwange Urban, a community marked by socio-economic and cultural complexities.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (1991) complements this ecological perspective by explaining how individual perceptions translate into behaviour. According to TPB, behavioural intention is determined by three factors: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Applied to this study, educators' attitudes toward counselling (positive or negative), perceived expectations from colleagues, parents, and policymakers, and their

confidence in their skills and resources collectively shape whether they support or resist guidance and counselling practices in schools.

Together, these theories justify the study's focus by offering a dual perspective: the ecological theory highlights the contextual and structural influences shaping perceptions, while TPB explains the cognitive and motivational processes that guide educators' actions. Using these frameworks allows for a holistic exploration of how perceptions are formed, sustained, and translated into practice in Hwange Urban secondary schools.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how educators' perceptions influence the implementation and effectiveness of the Guidance and Counselling (G&C) programme at Hwange Urban Secondary School. Specifically, the study seeks to examine teachers' and school counsellors' attitudes, beliefs, and levels of understanding regarding the G&C programme, and how these perceptions shape their engagement, support, and participation in counselling activities. The study further aims to identify perception-related barriers and facilitators that affect the quality, consistency, and reach of G&C service delivery within the school. By generating context-specific evidence, the study aims to provide insights that inform policy, strengthen professional development, and enhance institutional support mechanisms to improve G&C implementation in Zimbabwe's urban secondary schools.

This study contributes to educational research in three ways. First, it highlights educators' perceptions as a determinant of counselling success. Second, it provides empirical evidence from Hwange Urban, contributing to a relatively underexplored context in Zimbabwean education. Third, it generates policy recommendations that may strengthen the integration of guidance and counselling in schools, thereby improving students' academic and psychosocial outcomes.

### *Conceptual framework*

The first concept of the study is to examine the attitudes, beliefs, and levels of awareness that teachers, counsellors, and school administrators hold regarding the purpose and value of the G&C programme.

Globally, recent studies show that educators commonly acknowledge the value of school-based guidance and counselling (G&C) for students' academic, social, and emotional development. Yet, acknowledgement alone does not guarantee active implementation (Ahmad, Sewani, & Khoso, 2024). Research from diverse contexts indicates that teacher awareness and positive attitudes toward counselling are necessary precursors for referral and integration of socio-emotional supports into classroom practice (Geesa et al., 2024). However, heterogeneity in attitudes is evident: some teachers view G&C as central to student wellbeing while others consider it peripheral, a division often shaped by differences in pre-service or in-service training and by signals from school leadership about institutional priorities (Mbilinyi, 2025; Dzingirayi, 2023). Taken together, these studies suggest that while favourable perceptions exist at a conceptual level, role clarity and competency-building are crucial for translating positive attitudes into consistent G&C practice (Ahmad et al., 2024; Geesa et al., 2024; Mbilinyi, 2025).

Secondly, the study aimed to determine the extent to which these perceptions influence the implementation, accessibility, and quality of counselling services offered to learners. Contemporary evidence links educators' perceptions, especially self-efficacy and collective efficacy, with the fidelity

and sustainability of school programmes, including counselling services. According to Geesa et al., (2024) and Implementation of Guidance and counselling Teacher Competencies (2024), schools where staff report higher counselling competencies and stronger collective efficacy are more likely to schedule counselling activities, maintain records, and sustain services despite resource limitations. Quantitative and mixed-methods studies demonstrate that teachers' confidence in their counselling-related skills predicts proactive referrals, classroom-level socio-emotional teaching, and collaborative problem-solving with counsellors and administrators (Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Teacher Competencies, 2024; UNICEF, 2025). Conversely, low perceived competence and unclear role expectations are associated with sporadic delivery, reduced student uptake, and poorer quality of G&C provision (UNICEF, 2025; Mapfumo & Nkoma, 2024). These findings indicate that perceptions are not merely attitudinal, but they are tightly connected to concrete measures of accessibility and service quality.

The third objective was to identify the specific perception-related barriers and facilitators that either hinder or enhance the successful delivery of G&C activities within the school setting. Recent regional and country studies consistently identify perception-linked barriers that operate through material and normative channels. Mapfumo & Nkoma, (2024); Sahabi et al., (2024) and Dzingirayi, (2023) cite common barriers inclusive of inadequate training which reduces teacher confidence, the belief that counselling is the exclusive remit of specialised counsellors, stigma around help-seeking that suppresses referrals, and perceived lack of administrative priority. Conversely, facilitators reported across settings include structured in-service training that builds self-efficacy, visible leadership endorsement (which alters normative expectations), formalised timetabling of counselling activities, and collaborative models that distribute responsibility among teachers, counsellors and administrators (Geesa et al., 2024; Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Teacher Competencies, 2024; UNICEF, 2025). Evidence from Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries suggests that addressing both the perceptual (beliefs and role clarity) and the practical (training, time, space, records) dimensions is necessary to strengthen G&C delivery in secondary schools.

Lastly, the study aimed to generate evidence-based insights to inform professional development, strengthen school leadership support, and guide policy formulation to improve G&C programmes. The literature points toward a multi-pronged strategy to shift educators' perceptions and embed counselling in school practice. Geesa et al. (2024) support the notion of capacity-building approaches that are context-relevant and competency-focused, which have improved teacher confidence and counselling activities in several recent interventions. The Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Teacher Competencies (2024) also concurs with this strategy, as it creates educators who are competent to counsel learners. Leadership engagement is also crucial, as principals' visible support and accountability mechanisms, such as timetabling and record-keeping, change institutional norms and signal that G&C is part of the school's core mission, which in turn influences teacher behaviour (UNICEF, 2025; Mapfumo & Nkoma, 2024). The UNICEF, (2025) posits that policy reviews recommend flexible national guidance that mandates minimum training standards while allowing school-level adaptation; such policy architecture can change expectations and resource allocations that drive educator perceptions and practical implementation. Together, the evidence indicates that professional development, leadership endorsement, and

institutionalisation of G&C practices are likely to produce the dual benefits of improved educator perceptions and stronger, more sustainable counselling services.

## Research Method

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena through the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood by exploring participants' perspectives within their specific contexts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Since this research aims to investigate educators' perceptions of guidance and counselling in Hwange Urban secondary schools, the interpretivist worldview is appropriate because it privileges educators' voices and lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge.

Within this paradigm, knowledge is generated through interaction between the researcher and participants, recognizing that multiple realities exist depending on personal, cultural, and institutional contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Educators' perceptions are not fixed; cultural norms, institutional priorities, and professional identities shape them. The interpretivist approach, therefore, allows for a rich, nuanced exploration of how educators interpret the relevance and practice of guidance and counselling in their schools.

The study also aligns with constructivist epistemology, which holds that individuals construct meaning through social interaction and engagement with their environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is particularly relevant to Hwange Urban, where socio-economic and cultural dynamics shape educators' understanding and responses to guidance and counselling.

The interpretivist-constructivist framework is justified for three reasons. Firstly, it focuses on educators' meaning-making about the guidance and counselling programme. Secondly, it recognizes that perceptions are embedded within the socio-economic and cultural realities of Hwange Urban, making context essential to understanding the phenomenon. Lastly, it allows the researcher to use qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, which provide depth and insight into the complexities of educators' perceptions.

### *Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, to explore the impact of educators' perceptions on guidance and counselling in Hwange Urban secondary schools. A qualitative design is suitable because the study focuses on understanding participants' subjective experiences, attitudes, and meanings rather than measuring variables numerically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design enables an in-depth examination of a bounded system, in this case, Hwange Urban secondary schools, where the phenomenon of educators' perceptions of guidance and counselling is embedded in a unique socio-economic and cultural context. Case studies are particularly useful for providing a holistic understanding of a complex issue and capturing multiple perspectives in a real-life setting (Yin, 2018).

The choice of a qualitative case study design is justified on three grounds. Firstly, it enables the study to capture educators' nuanced perceptions, which are essential for understanding their influence on guidance and counselling practices. Secondly, by situating the research within Hwange Urban, the case study design highlights how socio-economic and cultural dynamics shape



educators' attitudes. Lastly, qualitative case studies accommodate diverse data collection methods, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon from different angles. By employing this design, the study is positioned to generate context-specific knowledge that can inform policy, practice, and teacher development in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

### *Population and Sampling*

The target population for this study comprises all secondary school educators in Hwange Urban. This includes teachers, department heads, and school administrators who play a role in implementing guidance and counselling programmes. This population is appropriate because educators are both implementers and gatekeepers of counselling services, and their perceptions directly shape how these services are delivered and utilized in schools. The total population is forty-five educators, representing all individuals directly involved in or influencing the G&C programme.

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A purposive sampling technique was employed to select twenty participants from the four secondary schools in Hwange Urban Area. The sample includes 12 teachers, 4 school counsellors, and 4 administrators. Purposive sampling is justified because it enables the researcher to deliberately select participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study and can provide rich, relevant, and varied perspectives on the G&C programme (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach ensures that data are collected from those with direct experience and involvement in programme implementation, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of the findings.

### *Research Instruments*

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to freely express their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, while the researcher maintained a guiding framework aligned with the research objectives. This instrument is justified because it captures detailed, nuanced insights into educators' perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for programme improvement. Document analysis of school records, programme schedules, and policy documents related to G&C was conducted to triangulate interview data. This method is justified because it provides an objective reference point to corroborate or contrast participants' responses, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

### *Validity and reliability*

To ensure trustworthiness in this qualitative study, several measures were employed in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources, including interviews and documentary analysis, as well as member checking, which allowed participants to verify the accuracy of their responses. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting key research processes, including coding procedures, analytical decisions, and the handling of interview transcripts. Confirmability was supported through the use of reflexive notes, enabling the researcher to acknowledge and minimise personal biases during data interpretation. Finally, transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the study context, participant characteristics, and methodological procedures, enabling readers to determine the extent to which the findings may apply to similar educational environments.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

To obtain data from schools, verbal approval was obtained from the school administration and the relevant education authorities. The participants were contacted and informed about the study's purpose, and consent was obtained. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet, private setting within the school, each lasting approximately 40–60 minutes. Relevant school documents, including G&C programme reports, schedules, and attendance records, were collected for analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved systematically identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns that emerged from participants' narratives. The analysis began with transcribing all interview recordings, followed by repeated readings of the transcripts to ensure deep familiarity with the data. Relevant statements were then coded in alignment with the study's research objectives, after which related codes were organized into broader themes and sub-themes that reflected shared meanings across participants. To enhance the robustness of interpretation, document analysis was conducted alongside interview analysis, allowing the researcher to triangulate findings by comparing and corroborating themes across multiple data sources. This combined approach facilitated a comprehensive and well-substantiated understanding of educators' perceptions of the Guidance and Counselling program.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study will adhere to ethical research standards as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018): informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, voluntary participation, respect and sensitivity, and ethical clearance. These ethical safeguards are critical in ensuring that the rights, dignity, and welfare of participants are protected throughout the research process.

## **Results and Discussions**

Analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that most educators demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards the G&C programme, recognising its importance in supporting students' emotional well-being, academic performance, and career guidance. A teacher noted:

*"I think the counselling programme is very useful. It helps students address problems that affect their learning, such as stress and peer pressure. Without it, we would lose many students to challenges we cannot handle in class."*

Another participant, a school counsellor, stated:

*"Educators understand the purpose of G&C, but sometimes they feel it is not their responsibility, which limits the programme's reach."*

However, the study also revealed variability in awareness and understanding of the G&C programme. Some teachers could articulate the programme's objectives clearly, while others expressed uncertainty about their role:

*“I know counselling exists, but I am not sure how I am supposed to participate. I usually leave it to the counsellor.”*

Administrators generally emphasised the strategic value of the programme, highlighting its role in promoting student discipline and school connectedness:

*“Guidance and counselling are key to maintaining a healthy school environment. Teachers need to understand that supporting it is part of their professional responsibility.”*

Overall, findings indicate that while educators value the G&C programme conceptually, their understanding and active engagement vary, reflecting differences in training, experience, and perceived responsibility. JAGC | 125

These findings are consistent with the literature. Ahmad, Sewani, and Khoso (2024) found that teachers globally recognize the importance of counselling but often lack clarity on their specific roles. Similarly, Dzingirayi (2023) reported in Zimbabwe that teacher attitudes toward school counselling were positive but inconsistent, influenced by training and institutional support. Mbilinyi (2025) highlighted that variability in teacher awareness often limits the effectiveness of counselling programmes, despite general appreciation of its value. The verbatim responses from Hwange educators reinforce these patterns that positive perceptions exist, but gaps in understanding and role ownership limit full implementation. This aligns with Rogers' Person-Centred Theory, which emphasizes that attitudes, beliefs, and self-concept influence engagement. Educators who value G&C but do not perceive themselves as responsible for its delivery may not act in ways that fully support the programme.

The findings suggest that while conceptual buy-in exists, targeted interventions such as role clarification, professional development, and institutional support are necessary to convert positive attitudes into active engagement, a conclusion supported by regional and international literature (Geesa et al., 2024; Mapfumo & Nkoma, 2024).

The second objective of this study was to explore how educators' perceptions influence the implementation, accessibility, and quality of Guidance and Counselling (G&C) services at Hwange Urban Secondary School. Data analysis revealed that educators' perceptions directly affect how G&C services are implemented. Teachers and counsellors who viewed the programme as essential were more likely to actively participate in counselling activities and refer students for support. One teacher explained:

*“When I see a student struggling with personal issues, I don't hesitate to guide them to the counsellor. I believe it is part of my job to support their well-being.”*

Conversely, educators with limited awareness or neutral perceptions often deprioritised G&C activities, focusing primarily on academic instruction. A participant commented:

*“Honestly, I focus mostly on teaching. Counselling is important, but I leave it to the counsellor because I don't feel trained enough to handle it.”*

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Perceived competence also influenced service quality and accessibility. Teachers who felt inadequately trained reported reluctance to intervene in student counselling, thereby reducing the programme's reach. A counsellor noted:

JAGC | 126 *“Some teachers don't engage with G&C because they feel it's beyond their skill set. This limits how many students actually get support.”*

Document analysis confirmed gaps in programme implementation, such as irregular scheduling of counselling sessions, limited teacher involvement, and inconsistent follow-up with students.

These findings are consistent with the literature on the role of perceptions in program implementation. Geesa et al. (2024) assert that educators' self-efficacy and collective efficacy strongly predict fidelity and effectiveness in school-based programmes. Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Teacher Competencies (2024) also highlights that teachers' confidence and perceived responsibility influence the accessibility and quality of counselling services.

In the Zimbabwean context, Mapfumo and Nkoma (2024) found that positive perceptions are necessary but insufficient; practical barriers, such as insufficient training and unclear role definitions, prevent effective implementation. The present findings mirror this pattern: while some educators value the G&C programme, limited awareness, role ambiguity, and perceived lack of skill hinder comprehensive delivery.

The results further align with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Educators who perceive G&C as part of their role, are supported by colleagues and leadership, and feel competent, are more likely to implement and maintain high-quality services. Conversely, low perceived control or unclear role expectations reduce active participation, thereby limiting programme reach and effectiveness.

The study underscores the need for professional development, clear role delineation, and institutional support to translate positive perceptions into consistent, high-quality implementation of G&C programmes in Zimbabwean secondary schools. The third objective of this study explored the specific perception-related barriers and facilitators that either hinder or enhance the successful delivery of the Guidance and Counselling (G&C) programme at Hwange Urban Secondary School.

Analysis of interviews revealed several perception-related barriers affecting programme delivery. First, limited teacher confidence and perceived competence emerged as a significant hindrance. Several teachers felt inadequately trained to handle counselling responsibilities:

*“I sometimes avoid referring students or talking to them about personal issues because I feel I lack the right skills. I don't want to make the problem worse.”*

Second, role ambiguity was commonly reported. Teachers often viewed counselling as solely the counsellor's responsibility, limiting their engagement:

*“Counselling is not really my job; I am a teacher first. I only refer students when the problem is serious.”*

Third, negative attitudes influenced by stigma around discussing personal or emotional issues were noted, especially among male educators:

*“Some teachers think students should toughen up and deal with problems themselves. They don’t take counselling seriously.”*

Despite barriers, several facilitators were identified. Teachers and administrators reported that visible leadership support encouraged participation:

*“When the principal stresses the importance of counselling, teachers take it seriously and try to incorporate it into their daily routines.”*

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Additionally, professional development and in-service training enhanced teacher confidence and willingness to engage in G&C activities:

*“After attending the counselling workshop last year, I feel more confident to help students and refer them appropriately.”*

Finally, collaborative approaches between teachers, counsellors, and administrators were highlighted as key facilitators, promoting shared responsibility:

*“When we work together as a team, students get better support, and teachers feel part of the process.”*

The findings align closely with prior research. Mapfumo and Nkoma (2024) highlighted that perception-related barriers such as low self-efficacy, role ambiguity, and stigma often hinder effective counselling delivery in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Similarly, Sahabi et al. (2024) emphasized that teacher attitudes and perceived responsibility significantly shape programme success in other African contexts.

The facilitators identified leadership support, professional development, and collaborative practices, mirroring findings by Geesa et al. (2024) and the Implementation of Guidance and counselling Teacher Competencies (2024), which underscore the role of institutional support and targeted capacity-building in enhancing programme implementation. From a theoretical perspective, these findings are consistent with Rogers’ Person-Centred Theory, which highlights the importance of self-concept, confidence, and perceived support in motivating positive behaviour. Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behaviour explains how subjective norms and perceived behavioural control enable teachers to engage actively in counselling activities. Addressing perception-related barriers through structured professional development, clear role definition, and institutional support is essential to strengthen the effectiveness of G&C programmes in Hwange Urban Secondary School and similar settings.

The fourth objective of this study sought to generate evidence-based insights from educators’ perceptions to inform professional development, strengthen school leadership support, and guide policy formulation to improve the Guidance and Counselling (G&C) programme in Zimbabwean urban secondary schools.

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Educators emphasized the need for ongoing training to enhance competence, confidence, and engagement in G&C activities:

JAGC | 128 *“Regular workshops and training on counselling skills would help teachers feel confident to support students. Right now, most of us only refer students because we don’t know how to handle sensitive issues.”*

Teachers suggested practical, hands-on training that focuses on real-life scenarios, problem-solving strategies, and effective referral mechanisms. This reflects a desire for capacity-building interventions tailored to their needs.

Participants noted that active involvement and visible support from school leadership encourage teacher participation:

*“When the principal actively monitors and supports counselling activities, it motivates teachers to participate. Leadership is key to making counselling part of our routine, not just an optional task.”*

Leadership was also seen as essential for allocating resources, scheduling counselling sessions, and reinforcing the programme's importance in school policy.

Educators highlighted the need for clear institutional policies that define roles, responsibilities, and minimum standards for G&C implementation:

*“We need clear guidelines and policies that tell us what is expected of each teacher. This would make it easier to plan and implement counselling activities effectively.”*

Participants recommended that policy frameworks incorporate evaluation mechanisms to monitor effectiveness, ensure accountability, and foster collaboration between teachers, counsellors, and administrators.

These findings align with the literature, which emphasizes that professional development, leadership support, and policy clarity are critical to effective school counselling. Geesa et al. (2024) note that sustained teacher training improves competence, confidence, and engagement in school-based programmes. Mapfumo and Nkoma (2024) also report that leadership involvement directly influences teachers’ active participation in counselling activities. Similarly, UNICEF (2025) highlights that policies providing clear guidance and institutional backing enhance the accessibility, quality, and sustainability of G&C services in urban African schools.

From a theoretical standpoint, Rogers’ Person-centered Theory explains the importance of creating supportive environments in which educators feel valued, competent, and empowered to act. Meanwhile, the Theory of Planned Behaviour underscores the role of subjective leadership expectations and perceived behavioural skills gained through professional development in translating positive perceptions into practical implementation. These findings suggest that policymakers and school administrators should prioritize continuous teacher training, visible leadership engagement, and the development of clear, actionable guidance and counselling policies.

Such interventions can enhance educators' perceptions, strengthen programme implementation, and ultimately improve student support services in urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the impact of educators' perceptions on the Guidance and Counselling (G&C) programme at Hwange Urban Secondary School. Across the four objectives, the findings reveal a nuanced interplay between attitudes, beliefs, awareness, and practical engagement in programme implementation.

First, educators generally recognize the value and purpose of the G&C programme, appreciating its role in supporting students' emotional, social, and academic development. However, variability in awareness and understanding, particularly regarding individual roles and responsibilities, limits consistent engagement. Second, perceptions strongly influence implementation, accessibility, and quality of services. Teachers with positive attitudes and perceived competence actively participate in counselling activities, whereas those with uncertainty or low confidence tend to defer responsibility, limiting programme reach and impact. Third, the study identified perception-related barriers and facilitators. Key barriers include limited training, role ambiguity, and stigma, while facilitators include leadership support, professional development, and collaborative practices that enhance engagement. Finally, the research generated evidence-based insights for improving G&C services. Professional development, visible leadership engagement, and clear policy frameworks emerged as crucial mechanisms to convert positive perceptions into sustained, high-quality programme delivery.

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These findings are consistent with Rogers' Person-Centred Theory, which highlights the importance of attitudes, self-concept, and supportive environments in shaping behaviour, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which emphasizes the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on action. Collectively, the study demonstrates that while conceptual buy-in exists among educators, practical interventions are required to enhance engagement and effectiveness.

Professional Development through implementing regular, context-specific training workshops for teachers, focusing on practical counselling skills, student referral mechanisms, and handling sensitive issues. There must be encouragement of peer mentoring and collaborative learning to strengthen educators' collective efficacy and confidence. Secondly, school leadership support should actively champion the G&C programme, integrate it into school planning, and provide visible encouragement for teacher participation. It must also allocate resources, such as dedicated time slots and space for counselling activities, to facilitate effective delivery. Thirdly, policy and institutional frameworks must be clear, actionable, and thoroughly outline teachers' roles and responsibilities in the G&C programme. Some monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be put in place to assess programme effectiveness and ensure accountability. Fourthly, reducing perception-related barriers is crucial as it addresses stigma and misconceptions about counselling through awareness campaigns and continuous dialogue among staff. Institutions must provide support structures for teachers, including access to counsellors and professional guidance, to enhance confidence in engaging with students. Lastly, it is imperative to conduct longitudinal studies to examine how changes in educators' perceptions over time influence the effectiveness of

the G&C programme. The research must also be conducted in rural secondary schools to compare perceptions of challenges and contextual differences across urban and rural settings in Zimbabwe.

These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between positive attitudes and effective practice, ensuring that the G&C programme delivers its intended benefits for learners in urban secondary schools

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