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Challenges Facing the Implementation of Counselling Programs at the Omani School

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to identify the challenges that hinder the implementation of student counseling programs in Omani schools. It also aims to assess the extent to which these challenges impact the effectiveness of these programs.

Methods: Data was collected using a qualitative research methodology, which included a focus group study involving 17 social workers and individual interviews with 100 students from various grade levels (from Grade 5 to Grade 12) in Al Buraimi Governorate, Sultanate of Oman. This methodology allowed for an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by both counselors and students.

Results: The findings revealed a wide range of challenges impeding the implementation of effective counseling programs. These challenges include lack of funding and resources, resistance from school administrations, deficiencies in counseling-related curricula, social and cultural attitudes that pose obstacles to the counseling process, lack of parental involvement, time constraints within the school schedule, conflicting priorities, absence of clear regulatory frameworks, and limited professional development opportunities for social workers.

Conclusions: The study highlights the complex nature of the challenges facing the implementation of student counseling programs in Omani schools. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes increasing funding for student counseling programs, providing comprehensive training for social workers, enhancing cooperation with school administrations and parents, and developing culturally sensitive counseling curricula. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective counseling programs and policies in Oman.

Keywords: Omani Education Policy; Counselling programs; Social specialist ; Challenges; Omani school.

التحديات التي تواجه تنفيذ برامج الإرشاد في المدرسة العمانية

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ملخّص

هدف الدراسة: يهدف هذا البحث بشكل أساسي إلى تحديد التحديات التي تعيق تطبيق برامج الإرشاد الطلابي في المدارس العمانية. كما يهدف إلى تقييم مدى تأثير هذه التحديات على فعالية هذه البرامج.

التصميم والمنهجية: تم جمع البيانات باستخدام منهجية بحثية نوعية، حيث شملت دراسة مجموعة بؤرية تضم 17 أخصائيا اجتماعيًا ومقابلات فردية مع 100 طالب من مختلف المراحل الدراسية (من الصف الخامس إلى الثاني عشر) في محافظة البريمي بسلطنة عمان. أتاحت هذه المنهجية استكشافًا عميقًا للتحديات التي يواجهها المرشدون والطلاب.

النتائج والتوصيات: كشفت النتائج عن مجموعة واسعة من التحديات التي تعيق تنفيذ برامج الإرشاد الفعالة. تتضمن هذه التحديات نقص التمويل والموارد، ومقاومة الإدارات المدرسية، وقصور المناهج الدراسية المتعلقة بالإرشاد، والاتجاهات الاجتماعية والثقافية التي تشكل تحديًا على عملية الإرشاد، ونقص مشاركة أولياء الأمور، والقيود الزمنية ضمن الجدول الزمني المدرسي، وتضارب الأولويات، وغياب أطر تنظيمية واضحة، وقلة فرص التطوير المهني للأخصائيين الاجتماعيين .

الخلاصة: تؤكد الدراسة على الطبيعة المعقدة للتحديات التي تواجه تنفيذ برامج الإرشاد الطلابي في المدارس العمانية. يتطلب معالجة هذه التحديات اتباع نهج متعدد الأوجه يشمل زيادة التمويل فيما يتعلق ببرامج الإرشاد الطلابي ، وتوفير تدريب شامل للأخصائيين الاجتماعيين ، وتعزيز التعاون مع الإدارات المدرسية وأولياء الأمور، وتطوير مناهج إرشاد تراعي الثقافة المحلية. يمكن أن تساهم نتائج هذه الدراسة في تطوير برامج وسياسات إرشاد أكثر فعالية في عمان.

الكلمات الدالة: السياسة التعليمية العمانية ، برامج الإرشاد ، الأخصائيون الاجتماعيون، التحديات، المدرسة العمانية.

Introduction

The Omani education policy focused on developing long-lasting learning, inclusive education, and scientific research that will result in a knowledgeable society and compete the national competence is Oman Vision 2040 strategic direction and top national priority (Oman Vision 2040 Booklet, 2023). This necessitates a concerted effort to create an engaging educational system that will provide students various scientific life skills. These skills will contribute to the formation of constructive, productive, conscious, responsible personalities, create values of competence, commitment, as well as qualitative and quantitative shift in awareness of the role that individuals in Omani society play in advancing economic development (Al Thani, 2024) .

The challenge of globalization with its characteristics associated with the expansion of economic, cultural, and political networks of belonging and affiliation across national borders around the world has now become abundantly clear to the education system in Oman (Al Thani, 2024). Moreover, the major challenge facing current generations is how to control multiple cultural inputs through social media and the information revolution.

Social specialists play a major role in guiding students and helping them acquire different life skills, which will benefit them, whether in raising their level of awareness of how to deal with the problems or challenges they face. In addition, they assist in academic and vocational guidance or raise awareness on how to improve the quality of their educational and behavioural attainment (Nkechi et al., 2016). Counselling sessions are a kind of collective counselling, in which the social specialist uses different and varied means in the classroom such as the interactive board, the whiteboard, posters, dolls, models, books, wall magazines, television, projectors, drawing papers, colours and comics. The social specialist also uses different methods when presenting the counselling lessons, which vary including PowerPoint presentations or telling a story about the subject of the counselling session with tangible personalities. Additionally, they utilize critical analysis methods to elicit students' cognitive outcomes, or the brainstorming method by asking related questions, high capabilities and the role-playing method by employing students to play as counselling representatives. The counselling methods also consist of student discussion or an expressive video clip about the counselling class, or the use of drawing and colouring in some counselling classes to measure the effect. (Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman - Student Guidance and Guidance Department – 2014)

The association between educational, economic and social development in both developed and developing countries is contingent upon the capacity of schools to equip children and youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to society. It is crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted influences that children and youth encounter from various social contexts, including family, school, neighbourhood, and community dynamics. The article posits that schools must prioritize the inclusion of all children and youth, irrespective of their circumstances, to ensure equal access to education. Furthermore, it underscores the detrimental impact of violence and conflict on the education of millions of children and youth, emphasizing the necessity for universal concern and action to address these challenges (Boitt, 2016).

Counselling programs become an integral component of the educational system in Oman, reflecting global trends and providing support for students' comprehensive development. These programs are designed to foster the personal growth and academic progression of students, particularly in response to the challenges posed by a rapidly changing and complex world. In 2000, the General Directorate of Counselling was established in Oman with the mandate of overseeing the initiation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of school-based counselling programs, with a particular focus on meeting the academic, social, psychological, emotional, and physical needs of students. However, the nature and purpose of counselling programs in Oman diverge from those in the West. Despite their importance, these programs encounter several challenges, including a lack of parental support, social specialist -to-student ratios, and unawareness of counselling services. It is recommended that more awareness programs, workshops, and seminars be conducted for key stakeholders, and that the student-to-social specialist ratio be reviewed to accommodate more social specialist s to address the challenges. Additionally, continuous professional development and restructuring the vocational and counselling department are recommended to enhance their effectiveness (Boitt, 2016).

Mental health plays an essential role in the well-being of children and adolescents, particularly in their social, emotional, and intellectual development. It has a substantial and direct impact on academic performance and behaviour. A range of personal and situational factors might affect the mental health of school students, both positively and negatively. Inadequate mental health interventions and treatments result in severe consequences for young people, including compromised quality of life and impairment of functioning. In order to support the mental health requirements of students, it is important to invest in the development of effective mental health programs that could cater to psychological problems of students of all ages at all educational establishments, particularly in Omani schools. (Guide to the work of the social specialist in the Omani school - Department of Guidance and Awareness Programs – 2014).

The basis for social and psychological concerns impacting students in schools are formed through altering societal, traditional, family values, and a disintegrated community (Wambu & Fisher, 2015). School counselling programs are aimed at the advancement of the development of students. In accordance to a study, counselling programs for secondary school students are aimed at resolving academic, occupational, psycho-social, and physical concerns of adolescent students (Eyo et al., 2010). The education system has witnessed major transformations over the past fifty years, and the large investment that the government has made in the field of education has proven its effectiveness. For example, the academic year (2018/2019), the number of schools reached (1,124) schools, with (579,024) male and female students, and (1000) male and female social specialist s. Compared to (1,270) schools for the year 2023/2024, with (773,631) male and female students, and (1,400) male and female social specialist s. (Omani Ministry of Education open data,2025)

The school social specialist, who is trained to provide counselling in relation to a wide range of other issues in a developmentally and culturally appropriate manner, is the person who should realistically conduct these counselling programs in schools. (Al-Habsiyya , 2021). The appointment of school social specialist s is a relatively new concept in Omani schools. In the early 1990s, the role of school social specialist was introduced to support the Omani educational system. Initially, the social specialists were only capable of addressing the needs of students with moderate and mild emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties. The results of this program made it apparent that there is an increasing number of students requiring professional counselling services for more severe difficulties and in the absence of a substantial number of qualified school social specialist s, school educators have inadvertently assumed most of the roles of a school social specialist. (United Nations report on social policies in the Sultanate of Oman,2007)

The rising demand for counselling services in Omani schools is a consequence of various factors, including demands from students, parents, and teachers, as well as the increasingly competitive nature of the country's schooling system. Open data on the website of the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman showed a noticeable increase in the employment of social specialist s to reach to (1,270) schools for the year 2023/2024, with (773,631) male and female students, and (1,400) male and female social specialists. (Omani Ministry of Education open data,2025)

The most significant demand, however, is generated by the students who require and are seeking such services. However, some students have faced difficulties in accessing and making use of these services. The extent to which counselling services in schools are being used in Oman is not known, since this has not been the subject of any research.

Thus, the current study sheds light on identifying the most prominent challenges facing those responsible for providing student counselling programs (social specialist s) and those who benefit from them (students) with the aim of analysing them and coming up with recommendations that will help decision-makers and educational policy makers related to student counselling in improving the reality of the student counselling process in Omani schools.

Research Question

What are the most important challenges facing the implementation of school counselling programs in Oman?

Research objective

The main objectives of this investigation are:

Analysis the most important challenges facing the implementation of counselling programs in Omani schools.

Literature Review

School Counselling

School counselling emerged around a century ago during the vocational counselling movement (Gysbers, 2001). School counselling programs have, conventionally, not been recognized to have a series of regulations and fixed labour divisions that have been recognized to control school social specialist s' behaviours (Hatch, 2008). Previous studies on the impact of school counselling have reported significant impacts on improving the capabilities of teachers in classroom behaviour maintenance, less disruptions in classrooms, and improvement in academic scores of the students (Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020). Mental health requirements of students can also be assisted and dealt with good quality services of school counselling .(Secretary et al., 2002). It was noted that the availability of time, a counselling work area, and sufficient resources to the school social specialist s enhanced the academic results of the students as a result of counselling programs (Day, 2004). Due to the belief of school success directly associated with future success, students in schools are persistently anticipated to perform at their best potential (Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020). The school performance quality has become a main aspect among students and the people around them as the world continues to become more competitive (Agi, 2013; PG, 2007).

Global Perspective on School Counselling

The global outlook on school counselling is aimed at the diagnosis and identification of social, psychological, and learning that are faced by students (McLeod, 2013). School counselling substantially necessitates companionship among the teachers and authority towards the school (Al Thani, 2024). Furthermore, it necessitates a role as an arbitrator among parents, students, and teachers in conflicts (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). Counselling in schools is critical due to the involvement of individual and group meetings for all of the students. Similarly, special needs and talented students were assisted through school counselling (McLeod, 2013). Hence, counselling has progressed along the necessity to establish a strong structure by which students can accomplish success in their academics. School counselling involves comprehensive counselling services, offering a framework that assists the involvement and individual development of students.

Counselling has become a vital aspect of education system due to its wide ranging roles (Al Thani, 2024). In addition, it aims to identify the positive standards and behaviours that can help support students to gain success (Lai-Yeung, 2014). It consists of identifying every student as a different individual with varying weaknesses and strengths. Counselling focuses on enhancing organizational and time management competencies along with prevailing behavioural issues. Counselling begins with settling issues, establishing sustained connections with others, and the development of academic aims. Thus, students are assisted to resolve their own issues.

School counselling plays various roles, guiding students to gain information regarding their upcoming academics and profession and prohibiting students from potential risk behaviour involvements such as, possibility of discontinuing education (Al Thani, 2024; Lai-Yeung, 2014). The comprehensive mandate of 15 counselling recommends that it is a portion of the broad approaches to guide students in participating in the country's growth and development, and enhance the educational framework (Bukoye, 2019).

School Counselling in Oman

Globally, there is an increasing demand for counselling programs. However, it is specifically needed in the Arab Gulf countries (Al-Lawati, 2019). Similarly, the Sultanate of Oman has a growing demand for counselling programs due to the fourth industrial revolution, rapid modifications in knowledge-based economy and technological developments (Awaineh, 2019). The constant exposure of different cultures on students through social media impacts their levels of development and introduces several challenges to them (Purnama & Asdlori, 2023). Conversing online through social media using smart phones for a prolonged period of time can lead to the development of social disorders like, phubbing and nomophobia (Anshari et al., 2016). The education system of Oman has only recently realized the complications of globalization, along with its factors linked with the development of cultural, political, and economic networks of associations through the international borders. Thus, the education policy of Oman has now aimed to focus on

establishing an integrated education system along with empirical research and sustained learning as part of Oman's 2040 vision, resulting in an intellectual community and competing national strengths (Oman Vision 2040 Booklet, 2023).

Challenges in Implementing School Counselling

It is clear that student counselling face significant administrative and organizational difficulties. (Al-Anazi,2020) conducted a study aimed to identify the most significant challenges facing social specialist s at schools. A sample of (80) social specialist s (females) from Saudi Arabia were placed. The study applied a questionnaire which consist of (30) statements. (Al-Anazi,2020) found that the most prominent challenges to implementing student counselling programs are the weak criteria of employing social specialist s, the lack of female social specialist s in schools, and the low cultural and educational level of parents.

Where (Al-Habsiyya,2021) study aimed to identify the reality of counselling process in the Omani Schools from schools' principals' perspectives. A sample of (205) principals from (5) different governorates, were placed. The study applied a questionnaire which had (2) open – ended – questions. The study revealed a clear absence of collaboration exists among teachers, parents, and social specialist s, The high density of students in urban schools is also a significant problem. The lack of social specialist s who possess the functional and professional skills necessary to provide students with suitable counselling services is making this problem worse.

Moreover, (Abdel Wadud,2024) aimed to evaluate the roles of the social specialist and identifying the obstacles that limit the effectiveness of his / her role. The study was also applied to a random sample of (111) middle schools' students and (33) social specialist s from different governorates, in Egypt. A questionnaire was placed to collect data from the participants. The study examined the challenges that prevents social specialist s, from providing counselling programs of appropriate quality and quantity to students. The study identified three significant obstacles confronting social specialists providing counselling services. Firstly, social specialist s reported being assigned administrative tasks by the school administration. Secondly, they noted a lack of adequate facilities to provide reasonable student counselling programs. Thirdly, they indicated limited up-to-date counselling techniques and methodologies.

(Ajwa and others. ,2024) study aimed to identify the obstacles that hinder social specialist from providing suitable counselling services in primary schools of Egypt. A sample of (422) social specialists were placed. A questionnaire was generated to collect the needed data from the participants. The study revealed the most prominent challenges facing social specialist s in primary schools. The study found that social specialists are assigned administrative tasks that fall outside the scope of their duties. Additionally, the study identified a lack of professional skills for counselling work and a lack of skills in using technology in counselling in order to attract students and influence them.

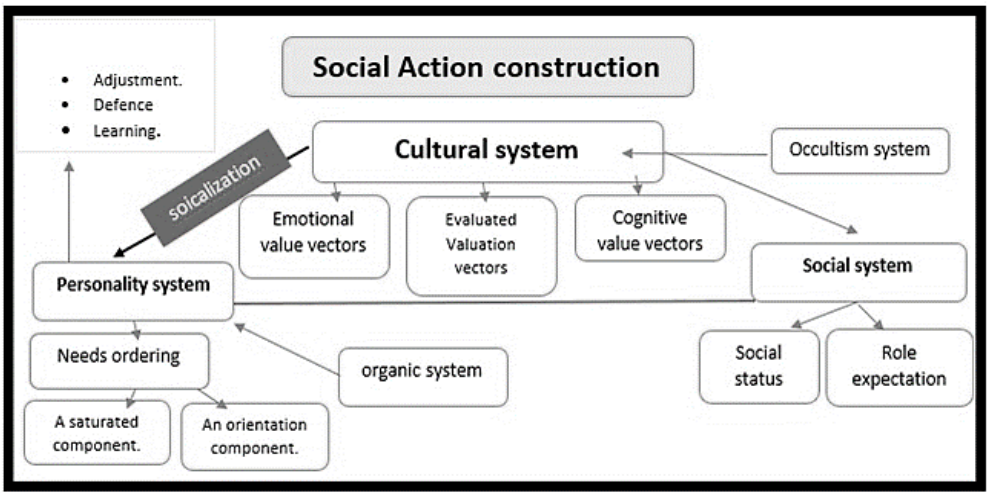


Figure (1): Illustrates the components of the social action-construction theory (Talcott Parsons) (source of the reference figure: Mohammad Al-Hourani, Wallace and Wolfe, 2012: p. 70).

According to Social Action Construction Theory (Figure 1), Talcott Parsons argues that there should be three fundamental systems: the cultural, social and personality which determine human action. The cultural system, as core guiding force, comprises cognitive, affective, evaluative orientations so combined together will enrich balance social behavior. The theory has been commonly used in educational and social situations as a framework on which to structure affiliated programs that promote social awareness and competencies.

Methodology

Methodological Approach

The current study relies on the qualitative approach in collecting data for the study. The data collection tools consist of:

- Focus group tool: for those implementing counselling programs and services in schools (social specialist s in government schools in the Buraimi Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman with grades (5-12).
- Interview tool: for beneficiaries of counselling programs and services in schools (students) from government schools in the Buraimi Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman with grades (5-12).

Research community

The educational policy in the Sultanate of Oman stipulates the allocation of a social specialist for every (500) students. Government schools in the Sultanate of Oman are also classified into two basic stages: primary stage: first cycle schools for grades (1-4) (students from 6 – 9 years old), and second cycle schools for grades (5-12), (students from 10 -17 years old) _ which are classified into four main categories: as it is shown in table (1).

Category A: Schools with grades (9-12) for boys or girls, and they always located in the city.

Category B: Schools with grades (5-8) for boys or girls, and they always located in the city.

Category C: Schools with grades (5-12) for boys or girls, and are usually located outside the city (suburbs).

Category D: Schools with grades (1-12), which are called continuous or mixed schools, and are always located outside the city (suburbs).

The current study community represents all government schools in the Buraimi Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman with grades (5-12), as it shown in Table No. 1.

Table 1. Current Study Community: Schools with grades (5-12)

School name	Grades	Category of school	School gender category	School location	Number of social specialist s	Population of students
Azan Bin Quis School for boys.	(9-12)	Category A: Schools with grades (9-12)	Male	city	2	709
Amnah bint AlImam Gaber School for girls.	(9-12)	Category A: Schools with grades (9-12)	Female	city	2	786
Al Sultan Qaboos School for boys.	(9-12)	Category A: Schools with grades (9-12)	Male	city	2	617
Al-Sultanate School for girls.	(9-12)	Category A: Schools with grades (9-12)	Female	city	2	565
Burimi School For Basic Education for boys.	(5-8)	Category B: Schools with grades (5-8)	Male	city	2	1008
Alkwarzmi School for Basic Education for boys.	(5-8)	Category B: Schools with grades (5-8)	Male	city	2	717
Hafsa bint Sirin School for basic education for girls.	(5-8)	Category B: Schools with grades (5-8)	Female	city	2	1064
Saara School for Basic Education For girls.	(5-8)	Category B: Schools with grades (5-8)	Female	city	2	744

School name	Grades	Category of school	School gender category	School location	Number of social specialist s	Population of students
Alfarooq School for Basic Education for boys.	(5-8)	Category B: Schools with grades (5-8)	Male	city	2	1053
Memonh bint Harith School basic education for girls.	(5-8)	Category B: Schools with grades (5-8)	Female	city	2	1051
Hothyfah Bin Mhasan School for Basic Education for boys.	(5-12)	Category C: Schools with grades (5-12)	Male	suburb	2	133
Yazid Ben Almhellb School basic education for boys.	(5-12)	Category C: Schools with grades (5-12)	Male	suburb	1	366
Zainab Bint Khuzaymah School for Basic Education for girls.	(5-12)	Category C: Schools with grades (5-12)	Female	suburb	1	314
Hafeet School of basic education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	107
Um Dharr al Ghafari School of basic education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	266
AlMeqdad Bin Amer School For Basic Education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	251
Malik Bin Anas School for Basic Education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	220
Wady Alehiol School of basic education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	220
Al Fia School of basic education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	-	40
AL- Senynh School of basic education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	151
Roudht Oman School for basic education.	(1-12)	Category D: Schools with grades (1-12)	Combined	suburb	1	147

Research tools:

It is worth noting that the approvals of the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman were obtained to apply the current study tools. The ministry appointed a specialized committee to examine the study tools: the focus group guide for social specialist s, and the interview guide for students.

Sample:

- **A focus group** discussion with 17 social specialist s from different school's categories that has grades 5-12 including a social counselling supervisor as shown in table (2). The focus group comprised 17 members from the targeted schools, constituting the study sample, including 16 social specialist s (9 females and 7 males) and one social counselling supervisor. The range of their experience as social specialist s in schools is from 2 to 30 years. All participants agreed to take part in the focus group, which lasted one and a half hours. The session addressed several topics, including the challenges facing social specialist s in providing counselling programmes for students in their schools. The focus group took one day to conduct, after a coordination with the educational district in Al Buraimi Governorate on October 16, 2024.

- **Interviews** of 100 students from different school's categories that have grades 5-12 in Al Buraimi Governorate in Sultanate of Oman. For the purposes of the current study, official approvals were obtained from the Ministry of Education to interview students from the targeted schools, which represent the study sample. Students were selected through a simple random sample from the lists provided by these schools. The students were interviewed face-to-face after obtaining the needed formal approvals from school's administrations, the interviewed students, and their parents. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. A total of 100 students from 20 schools were interviewed as part of the study sample. Five students were interviewed from each school that were targeted. Students were asked open-ended questions, including the following: *From your point of view, what challenges do you face as a student from taking advantage of the counselling programs offered to you at school?* It is worth noting that conducting interviews with students took about three months, from September 20, 2024 to December 31, 2024.

Table 2. Study Sample Demographic Characters

School category	Number of social specialist s targeted in the focus group	Number of interviewed students
Category A: Schools with grades (9-12) Boys and Girls	4	20
Category B: Schools with grades (5-8) Boys and Girls	8	30
Category C: Schools with grades (5-12) Boys and Girls	2	15
Category D: Schools with grades (1-12) Boys and Girls	2	35
Social counselling supervisor	1	-
Total	17	100

Results and Discussion

The challenges facing the application of student counselling programs in Omani schools from the perspectives of the students and the social specialist s of these programs is evaluated.

First: Students perspectives about challenges facing them from proper benefit of given counselling programs at their schools:

The interview questions for the students included the following topics as it shown in Table No. 3.

Table 3. Challenges facing Students from proper benefit of given counselling programs at their schools

Question Statement	Challenges facing Students from proper benefit of given counselling programs at their schools			
	Not satisfied (%)	**Students' perspectives *(Frequent student s' quotes)***	**Satisfied (%)**	**Students' perspectives *(Frequent student's quotes)***
Criteria: The presence of the social specialist close to the students. Question Statement: How available is the social specialist whenever you need assistance?	45%	*"Not always available, often busy when we go the his/ her office."*	55%	*"Available and always there for our assistance."*
Criteria: The suitability of counselling tools and methods.	85%	*"Suitable, but we aspire to the latest in using artificial intelligence*	15%	*"Suitable."*

Question Statement	Challenges facing Students from proper benefit of given counselling programs at their schools			
	Not satisfied (%)	**Students' perspectives *(Frequent student s' quotes)***	**Satisfied (%)**	**Students' perspectives *(Frequent student's quotes)***
Question Statement: To what extent do you find counselling tools and methods attractive?		*techniques, and we want to host specialists (social media influencers) from the community to provide counselling programs."*		
Criteria: Suitability of the place where the counselling sessions take place. Question Statement: How do you find the place where the counselling sessions conducted?	71%	*"The place is not suitable. The Social specialist 's office is always busy with students and parents."*	29%	*"Suitable."*
Criteria: Relevance of counselling programs to the student's needs. Question Statement: Does the counselling sessions meet your requirements?	66%	*"Not always appropriate to our needs."*	34%	*"Appropriate to our needs."*
Criteria: Social specialist 's ability to provide assistance to the student. Question Statement: Do you find your social specialist capable to assist you?	54%	*"Often helps me, but when I face a problem and want to go to the Social specialist, I don't always find time to go to him / her because of my classes or the Social specialist 's busyness."* *"When I face a problem and want to go to the social specialist, I don't. Always I feel worry or uncomfortable, I feel shy"*	46%	"*Helps me, but I think it is better not to go to the Social specialist. I am afraid whether he going to inform my parents or punish me."*

The results of the interviews with 100 students from different categories of schools that have grades 5-12 showed that the most prominent challenges they face during receiving counselling programs are as followings:

1. Criteria: The presence of the social specialist close to the students: The high density of students in the city's schools prevents the social specialist from giving them an adequate dose of counselling programs. Interviews with students showed that (45%) of them reported that the social specialist is not always available. Some reported: "*not always available, often busy when we go the office ".* While (55%) of them rereported "*Available and always there for our assistance".* Worth mentioning, counselling classes are usually applied as an alternative to reserve classes and may not fit the schedule of the social specialist, and this means that students do not get sufficient counselling classes throughout the year. A student reported: *"Not always available, often busy when we go the his/ her office."* This result might be explained by previous literature. It was stated in study of (Al-Habsiyya,2021) and (Abdel Wadud,2024) that the high density of students in the urban schools poses a challenge that prevents social specialists from providing counselling programs of appropriate quality and quantity to students. This result might be explained also by social action theory," Talcott Parsons" proposes that social construction, as a component of human social action, must be supportive. The presence of a sufficient number of social specialists, proportional to the density of students, is likely to enhance the quality of counselling services and positively influence students' behaviours.
2. Criteria: The suitability of counselling tools and methods: Providing innovative counselling programs using

methods such as influential stories, role-playing, brainstorming, discussion, and critical analysis methods, using various means such as a projector, television, interactive whiteboard, drawing, and using real-time moral and material reinforcement, will undoubtedly enhance negotiation skills, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and innovation to their high motivation to learn, not to mention their high level of intelligence and scientific superiority. Regarding to the suitability of counselling tools and methods interviews with students showed that (85%) of them reported that*: "Suitable, but we aspire to the latest in using artificial intelligence techniques, and we want to host specialists (social media influencers) from the community to provide counselling programs."* While (15%) of them rereported *"Suitable."* This result might be explained by previous literature. It was stated in study of (Ajwa and others. ,2024) and (Abdel Wadud,2024) it is essential for social specialists to maintain proficiency in technological applications to attract students and influence them. Current generations have been raised in the era of a technological revolution and tend to utilize social media and applications extensively in their daily lives. The theory of "constructing social action" explains this result by the fact that when the components of the cultural system: perceptual, evaluative, and emotional, are directed to students to affect them perceptually, emotionally, and evaluatively, this results in awareness, satisfaction, therefore balanced behaviour that is consistent with the laws of the social system: (school).

3. Criteria: Suitability of the place where the counselling sessions take place. (71%) of interviewed students reported: *"The place is not suitable. The Social specialist 's office is always busy with students and parents."* While (29%) of them rereported*:" Suitable".* This result might be clarified by previous literature. It was stated in study of (Abdel Wadud,2024) and (Ajwa and others. ,2024) that social specialists assigned administrative tasks by the school administration that fall outside the scope of their duties. This prevents the provision of an appropriate dose of guidance to students. Social Action Construction Theory, Talcott Parsons argues that there should be three fundamental systems: the cultural, social and personality which determine human action. To ensure the effectiveness of counselling services, it is essential to create optimal conditions for the social specialist in terms of time, place, and capabilities.
4. Criteria: Relevance of counselling programs to the student's needs: When a person has been raised properly, and his needs have been satisfied: his need to learn, to play, to feel safe and appreciated, to participate with others, and the social system in which he lives have helped him to achieve himself, and to play his role in an effective and satisfactory manner, here the construction of social action is balanced, resulting in a person with good character. positive behaviour. (66%) of the interviewed students reported: "*Not always appropriate to our needs."* While, (34%) of them reported: "*Appropriate to our needs.".* This finding is consistent with previous literature. (Al-Habsiyya,2021) emphasized the necessity for social specialist s to possess job skills and competencies that enable them to understand the social context of students, thus identifying their needs and attempting to provide assistance. Talcott Parsons in his theory elaborated that relevant context of cultural and social systems can be positive in educational settings because it can reinforce community-oriented values and social norms in ways that promote students' behavior's.
5. Criteria: Social specialist 's ability to provide assistance to the student: Students reported lack of positive health relationship with the social specialist, and therefore they do not tell him what they really need, the social specialist may provide students with a counselling program that is not a priority for students. Interviews with students showed that (54%) of them reported: "*Often helps me, but when I face a problem and want to go to the social specialist, I don't, I always feel worry or uncomfortable, I feel shy"*, while (46%) of them reported: *"Helps me, but I think it is better not to go to the social specialist. I am afraid whether he going to inform my parents or punish me."* The result is consistent with previous literature. (Al-Anazi,2020) and (Ajwa and others. ,2024) found that the weak criteria for selecting social specialists reflects lack of effectiveness of the counselling services provided by them to students in the schools. Social specialist matureness which grows up with the intensive training and qualitive practices leads to attract students to the social specialist, thus a

professional relationship going to be associated between social specialist and the students. Therefore, the counselling process going to be successful and effective. This result might be elaborate also by Social Action Theory," Talcott Parsons" proposes that positive behaviour of students increases when they find a stimulating school environment and efficient social specialist and teachers who provide them with appropriate support and counselling, especially since these behaviours are followed by the method of motivation, honour, and reinforcement. Most students have a stereotypical belief regarding the role of school social specialist s as those who issue decisions of dismissal and punishment in school. Therefore, these students do not think of resorting to a social specialist to receive appropriate counselling. A student reported: "Helps me, but I think it is better not to go to the Social specialist. I am afraid whether he going to inform my parents or punish me." This finding is consistent with previous literature (Al-Habsiyya, 2021) and (Al-Anazi,2020) revealed that low cultural and educational level of parents which made them misunderstand the right role of the social specialist, they don't encourage their children to ask social specialist support, Talcott Parsons argues that there should be cultural, social support which reinforce creating human action.

Second: social specialist 's perspectives about challenges facing them in providing counselling programs for students in their schools.

Table 4. Social specialist 's Rating of Counselling Implementation in Schools

Rating	Frequency	Percentage (%) n=17
Underprivileged	1	5.8%
Reasonable	15	88%
Decent	1	5.8%

The results of the focus group consisting of 17 social specialists from different categories of schools from grades ranging from 5-12 showed that the majority of the social specialist s' rating of counselling implementation in their schools was reasonable of 88%. While 5.8% reported it decent, and 5.8% reported underprivileged.

The most prominent challenges they face during the implementation of counselling programs from perspectives if the social specialist s are as follows:

Table 5. Challenges Facing the Implementation of Counselling Programs

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%) n=17
Inadequate Funding and Resources	17	100%
Limited Counselling Curriculum	16	94%
Lack of Parental Engagement	16	94%
Time Constraints in School Schedules	16	94%
High student density	11	64.7%
Counselling-associated Stigma and Misunderstanding	1	5.8%
Competing Priorities in Schools	16	94%
Absence of Clear Policy Frameworks	16	94%
Insufficient Professional Development for Social specialist s	2	11.7%

Inadequate Funding and Resources

Counselling programs are very important in shaping the personalities of students and helping them create their own thoughts and beliefs about different issues around them (Gachenia & Mwenje, 2021). Schools in Oman usually struggle with insufficient resources allotted for counselling programs. High student-to-social specialist ratios constrict the counselling system to a more challenging extent for social specialist s in offering individualized focus. Similarly, in

Oman, previous research observed inadequate counselling staff and funding, thereby hindering the provision of counselling programs (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2022). The social specialists indicated that the budget allocated by the Ministry of Education to each school does not exceed (3,000 Omani Riyals) for the first and (3,000 Omani Riyals) for the second semester, and there is no item in the school budget distribution allocated to student counselling programs. School social specialist s rely on their own resources to implement programs that require financial support, and most social specialist s invest available school resources in implementing counselling programs, such as the school's learning resource centre, computer room, and classrooms. One of the focus group members stated regarding the funding and resources "*that the ministry of education in Oman aims to make the school system integrated with school facilities and services in terms of counselling programs".* Consequently, the social specialists can arrange learning resource centre, computer room, and multimedia hall in implementing counselling sessions. This result might be explained by previous literature. It was stated in study of (Al-Habsiyya,2021) and (Abdel Wadud,2024) that the lack of resources is considered a challenge facing social specialist s, preventing them from providing better counselling services. However, Talcott Parsons elaborated on this by asserting that the efficacy of shaping social behaviour within a system, such as a school, is contingent upon the integration of the components of the cultural system, the social structure, and the personality system.

Limited Counselling Curriculum

Insufficient broad and standardized counselling curriculum persuades social specialist s to improvise, resulting in the delivery of inconsistent counselling services. Similarly, well-structured curriculum can substantially improve the academic achievements and emotional outcomes (Sink & Stroh, 2003). According to a study, social specialist s require support in performing innovative endeavours intended to the delivery of counselling programs at their schools (Low, 2009). Social specialist s confirmed that the Ministry's plan for student counselling programs is limited only to specifying titles or topics. There is no specific curriculum or methods designed by the Ministry. Specialists solely design counselling programs and invent new means and methods to help them provide better counselling material to students, each according to their age stage such as, presentations, posters, drawings, activities, etc. There is only one curriculum, the (Fawsil) program, which was launched for grades 6-8 in 2016. Consequently, the result of the focus group is consistent with the previous literature. (Abdel Wadud,2024) and (Ajwa and others. ,2024) elaborated that the absence of a comprehensive, standard curriculum to support the delivery of consistent counselling sessions by social specialist s represents a significant challenge. Talcott Parsons in his theory of social action supports this by saying that curricula are considered components of the social structure that help in the success of the process of shaping students' social behaviour.

Lack of Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is essential for achieving success in counselling programs. However, parents in Oman do not often take part in school-related matters, even though they acknowledge the school's positive impact on their involvement in their children's academic evaluation (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2022). The results of the focus group with social specialist s showed that one of the main challenges they faced in obtaining clear results for student counselling programs on student behaviour is the lack of an effective partnership between school and home, considering that the family is the first system of socialization integrated with the school system that supports it and fulfils its same educational goals. One of the focus group members stated that some families are unaware of the school's role in guiding students and modifying their behaviour. Some families have long protested and objected to the penal and punishment regulations established by the Ministry to modify students' behaviour. The need for family awareness of the importance of cooperation with the school social statistician is essential. Another focus group member stated that the effective partnership between school and home makes the counselling process successful and more effective. Not all parents are cooperative through their communication with the school, and their interest in implementing the recommendations that the school communicates to them. Therefore, the student's problem remains stuck. The result is consistent with previous literature. (Al-Anazi,2020) found that the low cultural and educational level of parents is widely acknowledged as an issue poses a considerable challenge for the social specialist, thereby impeding his or her ability to provide students with the comprehensive counselling services they require. The theory of social action assumed that the personality-building system (components

and director) would work together with the social structure (school) to ensure success in building appropriate social action. This process occurs through the family socialization process.

Time Constraints in School Schedules

Indistinct job roles add to the workload of social specialist s and diminish the duration social specialist s can offer and conduct their main accountabilities. Previous study reported that many social specialist s are burdened with un-associated responsibilities, leading to further reduction in counselling program implementation and efficacy (Hatch, 2008). The necessity for counselling programs in all schools cannot be overemphasized (Boitt, 2016). All focus group members confirmed that school administrations assign them administrative tasks that are not within their competence or basic tasks specified by the Ministry, or that the tasks assigned to them by school administrations are misunderstood. For example, school administrations entrust the social specialist with the task of following up on students' absence, but this matter does not concern him. The social specialist must study the case of the student who is frequently absent to determine the reasons and suggest solutions to the student's problem. This would disable the social specialist or distract him from his real work in student counselling, which would negatively affect the quality of the work. This finding is consistent with previous literature, (Al-Habsiyya ,2021), (Ajwa and others. ,2024) and (Abdel Wadud,2024) considered that social specialist s is assigned administrative tasks that fall outside the scope of their duties. While Talcott Parsons supported in his theory of building social action the necessity of providing a supportive environment.

High Student Density

Social specialist s face numerous workloads to offer services for a large number of students, resulting in reduced capability of providing individualized attention. Similarly, previous study has reported reduced efficacy of counselling programs leading to the development of inadequate provision of services (Reback, 2010). The high number of students, the cultural diversity, and the multiplicity of nationalities in the city's schools, with only two specialists, constitutes a major challenge, as it is not possible to provide adequate counselling services for such diverse students. One of the focus group members at a girls' school of grades 9-12, said that the density of the number of students and the multiplicity of the social specialist 's tasks cannot provide the counselling service to the student in the required manner, and she is also unable to follow up on these many cases on an ongoing basis, which affects the success of the study counselling process. One of the focus group members at a boys' school, stated: *"It has a student density estimated at 1000 students and the school have two social specialist s and one psychologist"*. This result might be explained by the literature. (Al-Habsiyya,2021) placed high to which a clear absence of collaboration exists among teachers, parents, and social specialist s simultaneously with the high density of students in the urban schools is also a significant problem. According to Talcott Parsons' Social Action Construction Theory, three systems that determine human action: culture, society, and personality. A school is a social structure made up of principal, teachers, social specialist s and students all of whom should work together effectively to create a supportive environment for social action.

Stigma and Misunderstanding about Counselling

Counselling programs for secondary school students are targeted to resolve academic, occupational, psycho-social, and physical concerns of adolescent students (Eyo et al., 2010). In the GCC, particularly Oman, mental health concerns are usually misunderstood and stigmatized which results in the reluctance of parents and students to participate in the counselling sessions (DC, 2022). This stigma is ingrained in the societal values, perceiving mental health issues as failures. Such perceptions can discourage students from seeking counselling, consequently affecting the efficacy of implanting school counselling programs. The results of the focus group revealed that the lack of awareness among some teachers, school administrations, and parents about the importance of student counselling programs in raising awareness among students and providing them with appropriate healthy habits, is considered one of the challenges facing the student social specialist. Some people underestimate the value of the counselling classes and find it not important compared to the mathematics, science, Arabic language, or other classes. One of the focus group members, stated, "It has been very difficult to me to work effectively since the teachers and the principle do not believe in my role as a student social councillor. They keep saying that students must learn instead of joining these unnecessary counselling sessions". This

finding is consistent with previous literature (Al-Anazi,2020) and (Al-Habsiyya,2021) revealed that the low cultural and educational level of parents simultaneously with absence of collaboration exists among teachers and parents with social specialist s constitutes a challenge that hinders the school counseling process. While Talcott Parsons emphasizes that the success of building social action depends on the cooperation of all the cultural and social system with the social structure (school) and its components (administration, teachers, social specialist, students, school workers, school activities, school facilities, school furniture, classrooms, and the family).

Competing Priorities in Schools

In different schools, absence of organizational framework demonstrating how school counselling must be performed has resulted in differences and irregularities within counselling (Wambu & Fisher, 2015). All focus group members confirmed through the focus group, especially social specialist s in schools with a high student population, that facing student events and situations daily is considered the biggest challenge to the plan drawn up by the social specialist to implement counselling programs one day. One of the focus group members at a boys' school, stated: *"It has a student density estimated at 1000 students and the school have two social specialist s and one psychologist".* He further confirms that the large number of students and the student situations that occur frequently during the day, make the social specialist s distracted and unable to provide an effective counselling program for these students. This result might be explained by previous literature. It was stated in study of (Al-Habsiyya , 2021), (Ajwa and others ,2024) and (Abdel Wadud,2024) that most social specialists are suffered from priorities conflict in their schools, exacerbated by student density and lack of cooperation from school administrators and teachers. This negatively affects the effectiveness of the student counselling process. While Talcott Parsons in his theory emphasizes the need to provide the appropriate environment and conditions for each member of the social structure (the school) to practice its assigned role without conflicting priorities or interference, whether external or internal, to ensure the success of the process of shaping social action (institutionalizing behaviour through the counselling process).

Absence of Clear Policy Frameworks

Since counselling is an integral component of the complete instruction program, it should be conducted according to the policies of the Ministry of Education as well as the state regulations and laws (Wango, 2007). The absence of clear policy frameworks for counselling services leads to irregularities throughout schools. Therefore, a well-structured framework is critical for assuring an effective and fair implementation. The focus group results showed that the lack of a clear policy regarding student counselling programs in schools is one of the biggest challenges that caused all the other challenges. All social specialist s emphasized that there is no official counselling class scheduled in the school schedule for students, so social specialist s' resort to using daily reserve classes according to what suits their schedule. The social specialist s emphasized that scheduling a weekly counselling session for each class would make it easier for the social specialist to implement his counselling plan for the students. Consequently, the result of the focus group is consistent with the previous literature. (Al-Habsiyya,2021) elaborated that the lack of social specialist s who possess the functional and professional skills necessary to provide students with suitable counselling services is making this problem worse. simultaneously with the absence of clear policy frameworks for counselling services. Meanwhile, Talcott emphasized Integrating cultural and social systems can be positive in educational settings because it can reinforce community-oriented values and social norms in ways that promote students' behaviours. In Oman, the programme of the counselling aligns with the theory in that it encourages awareness and balanced behaviour in students. Similar approaches in educational programmes all over the globe have also demonstrated that when educational programmes are balanced, students act in accordance with values of the society and thus promote individual and communal welfare.

Insufficient Professional Development for Social specialist s

To support the progress of students into well-groomed individuals, social specialists are anticipated to establish constructive counselling programs in schools. Hence, the counselling program should address all counselling domains, consisting of academic, professional, personal, psycho-social, and health related counselling (Ngumbi, 2004). Previous findings showed that social specialist s reported insufficient counselling development and training opportunities

(Dollarhide, 2003). The social specialist s participating in the focus group confirmed that the Ministry implements a number of training workshops for them on an annual basis, but these workshops lack the effectiveness of the applied aspect, and the specialists, especially the new ones, confirm that they did not receive enough of the applied aspect in providing counselling programs in universities, and the Ministry's workshops are dominated by the theoretical aspect and the insufficient applied aspect rather than the specialized one. This finding is consistent with previous literature (Abdel Wadud,2024) and (Al-Habsiyya,2021) revealed that social specialist s need more than what they studied in university to be able to counsel students. For example, they need to know how to conduct interviews and provide counselling. They also need to know how to deal with different student's situations. They need to receive professional training programs that are mostly applied and not theoretical. These training programs should be taught by people who specialize in these techniques and are able to provide the necessary guidance. Furthermore, the social specialist is considered as one of the components of the social structure (school), as expressed by Talcott Parsons in his theory, and therefore the competence of this social specialist and his ability to perform his role appropriately will certainly lead to the success of the process of forming social action among students through the process of according counselling to what he described. Therefore, the theory reinforces the necessity for the social specialist to receive specialized training programs that will enable him to perform his role in the system efficiently.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, it can be stated that several challenges faced through the implementation of counselling programs include inadequate funding and resources, high student density, competing priorities in schools and the absence of clear policy frameworks. Therefore, it is recommended that the social specialist s should be offered facilities, funds, and applied social work training by the school administration and the ministry. Subsequently, the social specialist workload must be diminished to target the challenges of social specialist s in implementing counselling programs, limited counselling curriculum, and lack of parental engagement. Additionally, time should be allotted for counselling sessions and a hall dedicated to providing counselling sessions.

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