Optimising resources allocation in implementing school counselling programme at schools in the Ohangwena region

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Abstract—This study investigated the provision of resources for implementing a school counselling programme from the perspectives of selected stakeholders. It employed a qualitative approach, which is framed within an interpretive paradigm. Thirty-five participants were involved: learners, principals, teacher-counsellors, and parents, and they were selected from schools in the Ohangwena region. In-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to gather data. Thematic results revealed that teacher-counsellors had no counselling rooms to conduct individual counselling, no separate budget for school counselling programme, and that file cabinets and display boards were only available in very few schools and were inadequate school-counsellor in schools. Learners' fear being mocked by others due to a lack of privacy. Thus, this study recommends that the government allocate a budget for school counselling programmes and post teacher-counsellors to schools where vacant posts are not yet filled. A lack of teacher-counsellors can result in students struggling with emotional and psychological issues without proper support. This can cause depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and behavioural issues. A lack of teacher-counsellors can result in learners struggling with emotional and psychological issues without proper support.

Keywords: Learners, Principals, Teacher-counsellors, Parents, School counselling programme

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I. INTRODUCTION

SINCE Namibia transformed from apartheid to a democratic system in 1990, there have been several drastic changes in all spheres. The education system has been affected and influenced by these changes. Hence, several policy changes and education programmes have been introduced to ensure that Namibians benefit from these programmes and are given equal educational opportunities. One of the education programmes that was introduced is the school counselling programme. The school counselling programme in Namibia is under the auspices of Programme Quality Assurance division in the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture. All counselling activities are then coordinated under the Special Education Programmes sub-division umbrella by School Counsellors from the Head Office and Regional School Counsellors from each of the fourteen regions in the country. Subsequently, schools with 250 learners' enrolment qualify for a Life skills teacher post, and this is the person who ensures that the school counselling programme is implemented at the school level. Life skills, taught as a subject in the school curriculum, is a model of education primarily concerned with prevention and not just with the cure of problems and developing the capacities of learners for responding appropriately to life situations. This way of thinking is for conceiving school counselling as meant for developing the "whole person" in learners and not just for seeing the school for intellectual development alone (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The school counselling programme is comprehended as a professional field with a broad range of activities and or services aimed at assisting individuals in understanding themselves, their problems, their environment, and their world and also to develop adequate capacity for making wise choices and decisions to find solutions to

problems (Egbochuku, 2008; Oniye & Alawane, 2008; Eyo, Obi, Mohd & Bernice, 2012; Lunenburg, 2010). The goal of the Namibian School Counselling Programme is the total or overall development of learners. The school counselling programme features activities for training in skills and abilities for learners' social, educational, vocational, moral and psychological development. The approach to school counselling is an educational process meant for the development of learners to adjust appropriately to life, especially in adulthood and during the working stage. Thus, as Namibia perceives it, school counseling is not an impromptu service that needs to occur once. Rather, school counselling is designed to be progressive and address the complexity of the human growth process in an ever-changing Namibian society.

In general, education underpins the achievement of all development goals. Failing to make adequate investments in education, therefore, puts the achievement of all education goals at risk. Literature suggests that for any programme to flourish and achieve its intended purposes, relevant resources must be in place (Wiltsey-Stirman et al., 2012; Mensah & Ricart, 2019).

Chireshe (2006) indicated that human resources are the most important assets of any organisation to succeed in its operations. Despite careful planning and organisation, the programme's goals are unlikely to be met without sufficient staff to carry them out. Some scholars identified human resources for the guidance and counselling programme as teacher-counsellors, teachers, principals, parents, learners, community members, and the business community (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Gysbers & Lapan, 2001). They all have instrumental roles to play in the guidance and counselling programme.

Moreover, previous studies indicated that financial resources are critical for guidance and counselling programmes to function effectively and attain their goals (Borders & Drury, 1992; Gysbers & Henderson,

2001). This means a budget is allocated for the school counselling programme to cater for materials, equipment, and other expenses accrued from counselling services. The above, mobilising political resources, also play a critical role in a programme's success. School counselling programme must receive support and endorsements from influential people in leadership roles, regional administration, and the school governing bodies (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Otto, 2001).

While some studies have been carried out internationally and a few from African countries to ascertain the specific resources needed for the implementation of the school counselling programme (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Chireshe, 2006; Thompson, Loesch & Seraphine, 2003; Lonborg & Bowen, 2004; Andronic, Andronic, Lepadatu & Tatu, 2013; Safta, Stan, Suditu & Iurea, 2011), up to date, a few empirical studies were conducted in Namibia to specifically investigate the provision of resources for the implementation of the school counselling programme. The findings on the availability of resources in schools for implementing the Namibian school counselling programme have the potential for stakeholders to know what type of improvement to bring to the programme and how. Generally, the findings of this study should provide valuable information to policymakers, teacher-counsellors, and educators for policy formulation and implementation and to improve the school counselling programme in Namibia to accomplish its established objectives.

Since this programme must be implemented at the school level, it is thus appropriate for stakeholders to understand their roles and responsibilities, especially regarding programme implementations in schools. Therefore, in this study attempt was made to investigate, from the perspectives of selected education stakeholders, the Namibian School Counselling Programme in terms of human, financial, and political resources available for implementing the school counselling programme in the Ohangwena region. The significance of this study lies in its potential to identify and address critical gaps in implementing the Namibian School Counselling Programme and provide evidence-based information to policymakers about the necessary resource allocation for the programmes' success. Therefore, the study aimed to ascertain stakeholders' perspectives on available and adequate resources in implementing the Namibian School Counselling Programme. Finally, it sought to enhance mental health and well-being support for students in Namibian schools by ensuring that the counselling program is adequately resourced.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various terms are used to describe the application of psychological and related knowledge in schools in Africa, including terms such as the school guidance programme, the school counselling programme, the school guidance and counselling programme, school psychology programme, and special education programme (Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006). These psychological and related school programmes offer psycho-educational assessment, career counselling, grief counselling, remedial education, placements, preventive health education, and consultation services.

Gothard and Bojuwoye (1992) also conceive guidance and/or counselling as help of psychological nature offered by specially trained professionals (psychologists or counsellors) to individuals who need assistance to address their problems. In this study, these concepts are used interchangeably. Resources have always been the key to providing any services that require the interaction of human beings in one way or another. Resources are those things that need to be in place to ensure that the work intended to be carried out successfully.

A substantial number of researchers have studied school counselling programme implementation in schools, most of which took place within developed countries, with a few emanating from Namibia or other African countries. Much of the research on the topic emanating from the West reported school counselling programme having enough human, financial, and political resources. For example, Gysbers and Henderson

(2000) and Gysbers and Henderson (2001) reported that schools in America have human resources for the school counselling programme, which include school counsellors, teachers (or educators), and school principals as well as counselling paraprofessionals and community volunteers. In addition, financial resources include budget, materials, equipment, and facilities. They stressed that for guidance and counselling programme to be effective, they should have a special budget, adequate materials such as books, videos, record folders, cabinet files, counselling manuals, career flyers and pamphlets, pens, pencils, and many others, and facilities like counselling room, classroom for developmental guidance or a guidance information or career center.

On the other hand, a few studies from the African perspective revealed inadequate resources for implementing the school counselling programme. This resulted in the unsuccessful execution of school counselling activities in schools. For instance, Chireshe (2006) revealed that the school guidance and counselling services in Zimbabwe had little funding, lacked information materials like career books and guidance counselling pamphlets, and had no adequate space for confidential personal counselling. Inadequate budget and physical facilities were found to have negatively affected the effective implementation of school guidance and counselling services in Zimbabwe. The general contention by Bojuwoye (1992) is that three major factors seem to inhibit the growth of school counselling programmes in many African countries, and these are finance, attitudes, and the fact that school counselling programme is not given a proper place in the school curriculum (Wango, 2006). This contention is confirmed by Shumba, Mpofu, Seotlew and Montsi (2011) study of school guidance and counselling programme in Botswana, which revealed a lack of funding, a shortage of counselling rooms and basic furniture such as bulletin boards or notice boards, bookshelves, a suggestion box, special cabinets, computers and equipment as key factors that hinder the proper implementation of guidance and counselling services in schools. Likewise, Egbochuku (2008) stated poor funding, poor supply of facilities and lack of essential materials such as tables with drawers, cupboard for storing records, counselling resource materials, pamphlets, and psychological test materials as majors' obstacles to effective provision of counselling services in Nigeria. Yirenkyi, Kyere, and Ofori's (2019) study revealed that a substantial proportion of counsellors in Ghana lacked formal training. Furthermore, approximately half of the schools had no dedicated counselling offices.

In contrast, Wango's (2006) research in Kenya indicated a more favorable situation, with 72% of observed schools having designated counselling rooms. The remaining 28% of schools lacked a specific counselling space, conducting sessions in staff rooms or other available areas. Conversely, UNESCO (2002) reported that Botswana schools had adequate human resources, counselling rooms, resources, and materials and equipment.

Regarding political resources, Andronic et al. (2013) revealed that learners perceived the lack of current specialised publications as the major setback to providing counselling services. Similarly, Safta, Stan et al. (2011), about counselling services in Romania, reported no strict regulations regarding the theme of counselling training courses affecting school counselling services. Gysbers and Henderson (2000) underscored the importance of political resources for effectively implementing the school counselling programme. They highlighted mobilisation of political resources as the key to success. As such, the school counselling programme must receive support and endorsements from influential people in leadership roles, regional administration, and the school board. Such pronouncement may be in the form of legislation, policy decision, political party's pronouncements, or newspapers and editorial statements about expectations of the school counselling programme. Various studies reviewed have identified shortages of human resources and a lack of funds as the major setbacks for effectively implementing the school counselling programmes in their countries, and the researchers felt that Namibia was no exception.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the optimising resource allocation in implementing a school counselling programme at schools in the Ohangwena region.

IV. METHODS

Research design and approach

The study used a case study design using the qualitative research approach. The researcher used the qualitative research approach to capture the life experiences of the school principals, teacher-counsellors, parents, and learners in providing resources to schools to implement school counselling services in the Ohangwena region. Qualitative case study research was selected for this study due to its ability to delve deeply into stakeholders' complex experiences and perceptions regarding school counseling programs in Namibian schools. As Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) noted, qualitative research assists in understanding phenomena from participants' perspectives. Additionally, Creswell (2012) emphasises the case study's ability to explore a particular subject in-depth. Unlike quantitative research, which often prioritises broad generalisations, case studies offer a rich, contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the complexities surrounding stakeholders' experiences, beliefs, and behaviours related to school counseling services.

Participants

The participants were learners, school principals, teacher-counsellors, and parents at schools in the Ohangwena region. The purposeful sampling procedure was used where three school principals and five parents were sampled for individual one-on-one in-depth interviews, and twelve teacher-counsellors and fifteen learners were selected for focus group discussions. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth and rich information from experts with first-hand experience. The sample size of thirty-five participants for individual and focus group discussions was considered more than enough for the study because, for phenomenological studies, sample size recommendations range from 6 to 10 for qualitative research (Mason, 2010, cited in Aloka, 2012).

It was, therefore, thought that the participants selected from these schools were well placed to give necessary information on the school counselling programme. Moreover, learners, the main beneficiaries of the school counselling programme were also in the best position to offer relevant information on their school counselling programme. Teacher-counsellors, being the implementers of counselling programme in schools, were the best to know all the challenges facing implementing such programmes. Principals are the executives of the institutions where school counselling programmes are being implemented to address barriers to counselling services. The principals, therefore, were in the best position to offer evaluative information, particularly about the programmes' objectives, the services to fulfill the objectives, or whether the programme is effective and worth continuing to be offered. In addition, parents, as the key role players in their children's education, should know what experiences their children are put through in schools, and hence, their involvement in the study.

Data collection instruments

Instruments for gathering data included individual interviews and focus group discussions. Different techniques were used to ascertain the credibility of this study's instruments and data, including triangulation (using multiple data collection methods). The interview was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain valuable information as it explored and probed participant's responses to gather in-depth data about their experiences and feelings (Creswell, 2009). The researcher also opted to conduct focus group interviews to allow participants to provide more information than one-on-one interviews. Both interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed for data analysis.

Data analysis

The study used a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research methodology that entails identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns, themes, and meanings within data (Aloka, 2012). The researchers first engaged thoroughly with the data, reviewing and listening to it repeatedly. The researchers then designated labels or codes to specific data sections representing significant ideas or concepts. Codes were categorised together according to commonalities or patterns. Moreover, the researchers identified overarching themes that emerged from the grouped codes. Themes were assigned precise and succinct titles that appropriately reflect their core character. Finally, the researchers analysed the highlighted themes and their relevance to the study. The findings are presented in a clear and coherent narrative, supported by illustrative quotes or examples from the data.

Ethical considerations

The University of the Western Cape Senate Research Committee first obtained ethical clearance for the study. Permission to conduct the study in the selected Namibia schools was also sought from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Ohangwena Directorate of Education Director, and the authorities of the schools involved in the study and all participants. Introductory meetings were held with the school principals to provide information on the nature of the research, including the purpose of the study and the conditions for participation. This information was provided to groups of potential participants orally and in writing. Further ethical principles by which the data collection process was framed include ensuring the participants' confidentiality and anonymity of their voluntary participation in the responses, informed consent, consent to electronic recording of interviews, and permission to withdraw at any study stage.

V. RESULTS

Optimising resources allocation in implementing school counselling programme

Human resources

Lack of teacher-counsellors

Participants identified teacher-counsellors, life skills teachers, other teachers, and the school principals. While all teachers are involved in one way or the other, a teacher-counsellor is particularly designated to run the school counselling programme. Teacher-counsellor conducted individual counselling and assisted in running group education meetings and workshops. Below are the extracts from the interview to substantiate these inferences: One participant said:

"Teachers and principals are involved in regular dissemination of information either in the classroom or in the school assembly or club meetings for educating about sexually transmitted infections (HIV) drug education, and they can also contribute to the fund" (Learner 11).

Another participant added

"Learners are being involved because they are the ones to be educated about sexually transmitted infections" (Teacher-Counsellor 6).

One parent said:

"Teachers–counsellors are the ones implementing the programme, yes again, the principals and the Heads of Departments assist in the implementation of counselling services help" (Parent 4).

The findings suggest a positive and proactive approach to school counselling. Teacher-counsellors designated as the primary individuals responsible for these programmes demonstrate a commitment to providing specialised student support. The involvement of other school personnel indicates a collaborative and supportive environment. The focus on educating students about important health and social issues reflects a comprehensive approach to promoting well-being. However, the findings also highlight the need for further exploration and analysis. Questions remain about the adequacy of training and resources for teacher-counselors, the effectiveness of the counseling programme, and the extent of learner engagement.

Life skills teachers

This study revealed that Life skills teachers play a vital role in

learners' development, providing essential skills that may be overlooked or underemphasised in traditional academic subjects. By focusing on essential skills like emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and communication, life skills teachers can help students develop into well-rounded individuals prepared to face the challenges of the modern world. Hence, not having enough life skills in school poses a challenge. Below are the extracts from the interview to substantiate these inferences.

One participant said:

"We do not have enough teachers who can teach life skills. This makes it hard to implement a counseling programme because learners need to know how to handle challenges before getting help" (Principal 4).

Another added:

"The lack of life skills teachers is a major obstacle. We need someone to guide us on how to make decisions and manage our lives. Without these skills, seeing how a counseling programme will be effective as difficult" (Learner 12).

Another learner echoed:

"Life skills are essential for our future. We must learn how to communicate, problem-solve, and make healthy choices. Unfortunately, our school lacks enough teachers to teach us these important skills" (Learner 16).

These findings highlight the critical role of life skills education in supporting student well-being and success. The ability to handle challenges, make informed decisions, and manage one's life effectively is essential for personal development and academic achievement. When life skills teachers are unavailable, the educational experience creates a gap. This can make it difficult for students to develop coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills, crucial for seeking and benefiting from counseling services.

Other teachers

Other teachers were asked about the lack of life skills in schools. The following interview excerpts serve as evidence to substantiate these inferences. One participant narrated:

"Our learners are graduating from high school with academic knowledge, but they lack the essential life skills to navigate the complexities of adult life. Without strong life skills, they struggle to make informed decisions, manage their finances, and build healthy relationships. This is a significant concern for their future success" (Teacher 5).

Another added this:

"The lack of life skills teachers is a disservice to our learners. They deserve to be equipped with the tools they need to thrive in the real world. When they leave school, they should be confident and capable of taking on new challenges. Unfortunately, many of our learners are not" (Teacher 12).

Another participant agreed:

"Life skills are just as important as academic subjects. They provide learners with the foundation they need to succeed in all areas of life. Without these skills, our learners are at a disadvantage. We must prioritise life skills education in our schools" (Teacher 8).

This analysis indicates that legal documents, including the Education and Public Service Act, guide the school counselling programme. These documents likely outline the programme's purpose, requirements, and procedures. The participants' perspectives highlight the broader impact of the lack of life skills teachers on learners' prospects. These participants advocate for a more comprehensive approach to education that includes academic and life skills instruction by emphasising the importance of life skills for learners' overall well-being and success.

Financial and material resources

Insufficient budget allocation

The study revealed that insufficient funding for school counseling programmes was a significant obstacle to their implementation in schools. No budget allocation for school counselling programme participants has negatively impacted the school resources, facilities, and materials available. For instance, the participants reported insufficient teacher-counsellors and no separate room for individual counselling with learners. The following extracts from some participants mentioned these.

One learner stated:

"I am unsure of any budget availability at school" (Learner 6).

The teacher counsellor added,

"Ministry introduces Universal Primary Education" [free primary education introduced], and schools receive money based on the number of learners enrolled" (Teacher-Counsellor 6).

A school principal shared:

"No budget, but we can solicit funds from outside sources, Red Cross to help needy children" (Principal 3).

These findings suggest that despite the government's efforts to provide free primary education, there are still significant gaps in resource allocation at the school level. Counseling services, a crucial component of student well-being, appear underfunded. This situation might be exacerbated by a lack of clear guidelines on distributing Universal Primary Education (UPE) funds, leading to inconsistencies across schools. The reliance on external funding sources highlights the precarious financial situation of many schools and the potential inequities in access to counseling services. In essence, while UPE has provided a financial boost to schools, it has not necessarily translated into adequate support for counseling programmes. This discrepancy requires further investigation to understand its root causes and develop equitable resource allocation strategies.

Lack of furniture

This study showed a lack of materials, such as textbooks, manuals, storage cabinets, assessment tools, handouts, worksheets, career development materials, counseling folders, and journals. They were insufficient to meet the needs of all learners. The following interview excerpts support these findings.

One learner said:

"Career manuals, posters, and pamphlets are not enough for all of us" (Learner 9).

Teacher-counsellor added:

"Ministry introduces Universal Primary Education" [free primary education introduced] (Teacher-Counsellor 6).

Another participant alluded:

"Resources include counselling pamphlets" (Principal 3).

One parent said:

"Learners do not have adequate materials to use in school" (Parent 4).

A consistent theme that emerged from the perspectives of learners, teacher-counsellors, principals, and parents is a shortage of adequate resources for school counselling. Learners expressed dissatisfaction with limited materials like career manuals and pamphlets, while educators acknowledged the existence of counselling pamphlets but questioned their sufficiency. Parents echoed these concerns, emphasising a broader lack of student resources. This suggests a significant gap between the available resources and learners' actual needs, potentially hindering the counseling programme's effectiveness.

Shortage of infrastructural facilities

Participants further revealed a shortage of infrastructure, and many schools had overcrowded classrooms. They added that a shortage of display boards for career information resulted in many learners not knowing which careers to follow, and the lack of lockable cabinet files compromised the confidentiality of counselled learners.

One participant said:

"Overcrowded classrooms and no rooms for a private discussion with the teacher-counsellor caused reluctance in learners seeking counselling services" (Learner 5).

Another one added:

"…No counselling room available, and most learners feel unsafe to talk to Teacher counsellors, fearing that others will see them" (Teacher-Counsellor 2).

Another participant agreed:

"Shortage of rooms is a big problem. Teacher counsellors have no private room where they need to sit with learners and provide counselling in a private place" (Principal 1).

Learners, teachers, and principals identified a recurring challenge: the lack of private spaces for counselling sessions. Overcrowded classrooms and the absence of dedicated counselling rooms created

barriers to learners seeking support, fostering discomfort and vulnerability. This lack of privacy negatively impacted the counselling process, potentially discouraging students from seeking help.

Political resources

Participants reported that political resources are essential in effectively implementing the Namibian School Counselling Programme. They indicated that political leaders profess interest in and support the implementation of the School Counselling Programme by endorsing legislation and acts. The School Counselling Programme achieves its intended goals. They further reported that the Ministry of Education had introduced the Education Act (Act 16 of 2001), Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Life Skills and Learner Pregnancy policies to assist in the implementation of a school counselling programme by providing services to meet the basic needs of learners which indirectly make school environment conducive and motivate learners towards improved performance. Moreover, some participants indicated that schools receive little information, such as information on circulars and legislation.

One learner shared:

"School principals inform us about the policies and school rules during assembly time. We are normally informed during the morning assembly" (Learner 6).

One teacher counsellor confirmed:

"We have circular on Life Skills provision in schools and legal documents like Education Act (Act 16 of 2001) and Public Service Act (Act 13 of 1995" *that guide us. These legal documents outline the framework for implementing the school counselling programme"* (Teacher-Counsellor 12).

Principal agreed:

"We got circulars, Acts, and Legislations that we need at school. However, sometimes, some documents need proper interpretation, as we do not have the same understanding" (Principal 2).

One parent stated:

"Yes, there are policies in school; one of them is the Sector Policy on Teenage Pregnancy Prevention and Management, but this policy is controversial, and some parents are not in favour of it" (Parent 2).

The findings indicate a mixed response to the availability and understanding of school policies and guidelines. While schools have access to circulars, acts, and legislation governing school operations and counselling programmes, there appears to be a gap in effective dissemination and comprehension. While assemblies provide a platform for informing learners about school rules, the effectiveness of this method in conveying complex policies is questionable. Moreover, the introduction of controversial policies, such as the one on teenage pregnancy, highlights the need for sensitive and comprehensive communication strategies to address diverse perspectives and foster community engagement.

VI.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study highlights teachers, principals, and Teacher-counsellors' pivotal roles in implementing school counseling programmes. Teachers and principals are seen as key disseminators of information related to sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, often utilising platforms like classrooms, assemblies, and club meetings. This highlights the importance of their involvement in preventive health education. Counselors, in collaboration with principals and heads of departments, are primarily responsible for implementing counselling services. However, some studies showed that there were very few human resources for counselling services in schools, especially in African countries (Mbongo, 2013; Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani, & Frank, 2013; Chireshe, 2006; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Mapfumo, 2011). This underscores the critical role of teacher-counsellors in providing direct support and guidance to learners. While the involvement of these key personnel is essential, several challenges may arise. Overburdened teachers and principals might struggle to balance their regular duties with the additional health education and counselling support services responsibilities. Teacher-counsellors' workload might also be overwhelming, particularly in schools with large student populations. Additionally, the lack of specialised training in counseling for teachers and principals could hinder the effectiveness of their roles.

The inadequate budget allocation for school counselling programs is a critical challenge. While the introduction of Universal Primary Education has led to increased funding for schools based on enrolment numbers, participants highlighted the insufficiency of these funds to support counselling services effectively. The disparity between the financial needs of comprehensive counselling programmes and the available resources is evident. The suggestion of seeking external funding, as proposed by one principal, underscores the financial limitations schools face. Collaborations with organisations like the Red Cross can be explored as potential avenues for supplementing the existing budget.

A shortage of essential counselling materials, such as career manuals, posters, and pamphlets, was reported by both learners and parents. These resources are crucial for providing learners with necessary information and support. The limited availability of materials hinders the effectiveness of counselling programmes and impacts learners' access to crucial information. These findings concurred with few studies which reported a lack of funding, lack of information materials, lack of space for confidential counselling, shortage of counselling equipment and videos, lack of counselling pamphlets, career manuals, and many other pertinent facilities needed for the implementation of counselling services in schools (Mbongo, 2013; Mushaandja et al., 2013; Shumba et al., 2011; Chireshe, 2006)

Moreover, the provision of adequate infrastructure for school counseling emerges as a significant challenge. The lack of private counseling spaces is a recurring theme in the participants' responses. Overcrowded classrooms and the absence of designated counseling rooms create a hostile environment for confidential and effective counseling sessions. The combined challenges of insufficient budget and limited materials have significant implications for implementing school counseling programmes. Schools may struggle to hire qualified counselors, provide training, and purchase essential materials without adequate financial resources. The scarcity of materials can limit the scope of counseling services and compromise the overall quality of support provided to learners.

These findings concurred with the previous studies which reported lack of funding, lack of information materials, lack of space for confidential counselling, shortage of counselling equipment and videos, lack of counselling pamphlets, career manuals, and many other pertinent facilities needed for the implementation of counselling services in schools (Mbongo, 2013; Mushaandja et al., 2013; Shumba et al., 2011; Chireshe, 2006). The low budget for school counselling programme in schools in developing countries, specifically in Namibia, is not a surprise and could be attributed to two things: First, the subordinate status given to counselling in many schools. In this case, school principals would not see the need to allocate funds to counselling services but rather allocate more funds to the Mathematics and Science department or emphasis more and place value on academic subjects than counselling. However, school principals have a role in ensuring enough resources are allocated for school counselling services, especially now that schools in Namibia are allocated funds through UPE. Maluwa-Banda (1998) asserted that principals are in a key position to ensure a successful programme by showing interest in it, having a positive attitude towards it, maintaining open lines of communication with teaching staff, counsellors, and learners concerning the programme, and promoting a climate conducive to professional development and student growth. Secondly, the counselling field is usually not understood well, as most people believe that it is only for people suffering from mental problems. Therefore, this situation was exacerbated by the lack of funds for the counselling programme, the lack of support from school management, and the lack of a common understanding among staff members.

The findings revealed that the school counselling programme

operates within a legal framework established by the Education Act and Public Service Act. These documents provide essential guidelines for the programme's objectives, protocols, and operational procedures. These findings support Safta et al. (2011) and Gysbers and Henderson (2000) findings that regulations and legislation, policy decision, and political party's pronouncement or newspapers and editorial statements are critical to the effective implementation of the school counselling programme.

The findings suggest that a lack of resources is the major setback to effectively implementing school counselling programme services. Shortage of resources, specifically financial resources, is the dominant hindrance to properly implementing school counselling services. The shortage of teacher-counsellors is not only the problem plaguing the Namibian school counselling programme, but they are also not well trained for their job roles, and there were more beneficiaries than the services could cope with due to the shortage of teacher-counsellors. However, these findings have implications for Namibian leaders; though participants indicated the availability of political resources in schools, the fact that counselling services are underfunded, the fact is that learners are denied a great opportunity to learn skills that would enable them to become independent and critical thinkers and to realise their full potential and be able to contribute to the socio-economic advancements of their country.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture optimise the school counselling programme by appointing more teacher-counsellors, allocating them based on the number of learners per school, providing adequate training in health education and counseling skills, and addressing the workload of teacher-counselors. It also suggests increasing budget allocations for school counseling programmes, exploring alternative funding sources, and establishing partnerships with external organisations. Schools should prioritise procuring essential counseling materials and develop sustainable distribution strategies. Schools should create private counseling spaces, explore alternative settings like outdoor or mobile units, and repurpose existing rooms, partition classrooms, or construct dedicated rooms. Furthermore, schools should create private counseling spaces, explore alternative settings like outdoor or mobile units, and repurpose existing rooms, partition classrooms, or construct dedicated rooms. Further research could focus on developing collaborative models between teachers, counsellors, and parents to enhance learner support services at schools or the influence of teacher and principal leadership styles on school climate and learner's mental health. Moreover, future research can also investigate the impact of teacher-counsellor burnout on learner mental health outcomes.

VIII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

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