

Psychological and Pedagogical Support for First-Year Middle School Students from the Perspective of Guidance Counselors

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the psychological and pedagogical support strategies provided to first-year middle school students from the perspective of guidance counselors. A randomly selected sample of 42 counselors working in middle schools in El Oued. The study used the descriptive exploratory method. Data was collected via structured interviews. The main findings include: (1) students face psychological and social issues, ranked in descending order according to the counselors' perspectives as follows: low self-confidence, difficulty in social interaction, anxiety, stress, and depression.; (2) various psychological support methods are employed, including individual, family, group, and play counseling; (3) pedagogical support methods, ranked by frequency: guiding students to address personal/social difficulties, managing school-related stress, developing time-management skills, improving communication, and extracurricular activities; (4) counselors face multiple challenges in providing support, ranked by frequency: workload/time constraints, lack of parental cooperation, administrative disengagement, and student reluctance.

Keywords: psychological support; pedagogical support; first-year middle school.

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1- Introduction

Psychological and pedagogical support are essential components influencing students' academic success, particularly during the transitional phase from primary to middle school. First-year middle school students experience significant psychological and biological changes that may affect their academic performance and social interaction. Hence, guidance counselors play a pivotal role in providing structured support strategies to help these students adapt to their new educational environment.

1.1- Problem Statement

The middle school stage, particularly the first year represents one of the most critical transitional phases in a student's academic journey. During this period, students move from a familiar primary school environment to a new and more complex educational system characterized by more demanding curricula, different teaching staff, and novel assessment methods. This abrupt transition is often accompanied by psychological and behavioral changes associated with the onset of early adolescence, rendering students vulnerable to confusion, anxiety, and even academic failure if not adequately supported.

Therefore, psychological and pedagogical support for first-year middle students is considered a key factor in promoting the overall success of the educational process and, more specifically, in ensuring the student's academic adjustment. Such support plays a vital role in fostering both psychological and academic adaptation, thereby enhancing students' ability to cope with the challenges of this transitional stage. The responsibility for this support falls primarily on the educational system, including school administrators, counselors, teachers, and families. It aims to help adolescents overcome challenges in their academic journey, understand behavioral issues, develop coping strategies, and make informed decisions. As students engage with key social and educational agents -such as peers, teachers, and other educational personnel- they gradually acquire scientific knowledge and competencies that prepare them for effective learning and practical training. This, in turn, enhances their chances of academic success and enables them to shape their future personal projects in accordance with their interests, abilities, aspirations, and the realities of their environment. The importance of psychological and pedagogical support for first-year middle school students lies in ensuring adequate care during this critical initial stage, thereby enabling them to perform optimally and achieve both academic and social adjustment. Based on this context, the central research question of the study can be formulated as follows:

- What are the psychological and pedagogical support methods provided to first-year middle school students from the perspective of guidance counselors?

This central question leads to the following sub-questions:

- What are the main psychological problems faced by first-year middle school students according to guidance counselors?
- What psychological support strategies are applied to these students from the counselors' perspective?
- What pedagogical support strategies are utilized according to guidance counselors?
- What challenges do guidance counselors face in providing psychological and pedagogical support to these students?

1.2- Hypotheses of the Study

First Hypothesis: First-year middle school students face psychological problems according to guidance counselors.

Second Hypothesis: These students receive multiple psychological support strategies as perceived by school and vocational counselors.

Third Hypothesis: They also receive various pedagogical support strategies according to counselors' perspectives.

Fourth Hypothesis: Counselors face several challenges in providing psychological and pedagogical support.

1.3- Objectives of the Study

- To identify the nature of psychological problems experienced by first-year middle school students.
- To examine the psychological support methods adopted by counselors.
- To determine the pedagogical support strategies used by counselors for educational support.
- To uncover professional and organizational challenges that hinder the counselors' support roles.

1.3- Significance of the Study

1 Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of educational psychology and school counseling. It sheds light on a critical transitional phase that students undergo at the beginning of middle school, which is often marked by significant psychological, social, and behavioral changes. By exploring the psychological and pedagogical support mechanisms at this stage, the study contributes to enriching scientific knowledge regarding appropriate support strategies and deepens understanding of students' psychological needs. This enables both researchers and practitioners to develop effective theoretical models in school counseling.

-2 Practical Significance

The practical importance of the study lies in its ability to guide professional practices of school and vocational counselors toward effective and integrated support strategies. The study's results can contribute to:

- Enhancing school counseling programs within educational institutions.
- Providing accurate field data to design realistic intervention strategies tailored to the developmental characteristics of first-year students.
- Raising awareness among educators, school leaders, and parents about the importance of collaboration with counselors.
- Supporting students in overcoming psychological and pedagogical difficulties that hinder academic integration and performance.

1.4- Theoretical Framework

-1 Definition of Psychological Support

Hamed Zahran (2003) defines psychological support as a process aimed at assisting students in developing an educational plan aligned with their personal abilities, interests, and aspirations. This is achieved by guiding them in selecting academic tracks and curricula that suit their individual profiles. Psychological support also involves diagnosing educational difficulties that students may encounter and addressing them methodically, in a way that promotes academic adjustment and facilitates their educational success.

According to Abou Asaad (2009), the American Counseling Association defined psychological support as a set of services provided by specialists in counseling psychology. These services are grounded in scientific principles based on the study of human behavior and aim to achieve psychological adjustment in beneficiaries, while also equipping them with new life skills that enable them to cope with developmental demands and adapt to life's changes.

In contrast, Badawi Ahmed Zaki defined psychological support as an educational process intended to assist students in overcoming the difficulties they encounter in their academic journey.

In the same context, Shaqir (2011) considers psychological support to be a set of psychological interventions directed toward students facing emotional, behavioral, or

academic difficulties. These interventions aim to promote their psychological and social well-being and to ensure their proper integration into the school environment.

Overall, psychological support can be defined as a comprehensive process aimed at assisting students on both psychological and educational levels. It involves a range of professional preventive and therapeutic interventions conducted by specialists in psychological and educational counseling. These interventions are grounded in scientific principles for understanding human behavior and diagnosing difficulties that may hinder a student's psychological balance. The ultimate goal is to help students gain self-understanding, develop their capacities, and acquire essential life skills, thereby facilitating their adjustment to the school environment and enhancing their academic success.

Operationally, psychological support for first-year middle school students refers to the set of purposeful and structured psychological interventions provided within educational institutions by trained psychologists, school counselors, or qualified teachers. These interventions aim to support students emotionally during their transition from primary to middle school -a period considered sensitive in terms of psychological and emotional development- and include individual and group counseling, family counseling, and play therapy sessions.

-2 Definition of Pedagogical Support

According to Ben Bouzid (2015), pedagogical support is a set of organized educational interventions aimed at addressing learning difficulties encountered by students. It emphasizes individualized educational approaches and strategies to support students in overcoming learning barriers and achieving academic success.

Operationally, pedagogical support refers to the set of educational and instructional procedures and methods adopted within the educational institution, with the aim of assisting the student academically, overcoming the learning difficulties he or she faces, and facilitating adaptation to new pedagogical demands particularly in the first year of middle school. This support relies on several approaches, including helping students address personal and social challenges, cope with school-related stress, develop time management skills, improve communication abilities, and engage in extracurricular activities within the school environment.

-3 Objectives of Psychological and Pedagogical Support

According to Turki (2012), the aim of psychological and pedagogical support is to:

- Establish the foundations of a balanced and inclusive school environment that ensures the fulfillment of learners' diverse psychological and educational needs. This is achieved through a set of core objectives designed to enhance students' chances of academic success and personal development.
- Promote psychological and social balance within the school setting, thereby contributing to a healthy and safe learning climate.
- Provide an inclusive educational environment that respects individual differences and responds to varying student abilities.
- Assist students in overcoming academic setbacks and behavioral difficulties that may hinder their educational progress.
- Foster intrinsic motivation for learning and strengthening self-esteem and personal efficacy.
- Reduce school dropout rates, particularly those resulting from academic failure or difficulties in school adjustment.
- Enhance educational cooperation between the family and school through the implementation of joint guidance, follow-up, and support mechanisms.

-4 Strategies of Psychological and Pedagogical Support

-5 Definition of Psychological and Pedagogical Support Strategies

According to Abou Asaad (2009), psychological and pedagogical support strategies are defined as a set of coordinated educational and psychological interventions aimed at assisting students in overcoming academic and behavioral difficulties, and at fostering psychological and social balance within the school environment. These strategies are implemented through support programs, guidance, and educational therapy, while taking into account individual differences. They can be represented through the following services and strategies:

a. Individual Counseling

According to Al-Zaid (2011), individual counseling is a structured professional process aimed at providing support to a specific student through direct sessions with a psychological or educational counselor. The goal is to help the student gain self-awareness, understand personal difficulties, and make informed decisions that promote academic, psychological, and social adjustment.

According to Al-Zaid, this approach is considered one of the most effective counseling methods used in the school environment, due to the privacy and depth of communication it offers with the student. It allows the student to express personal problems freely and helps them develop self-adjustment skills and cope with psychological and behavioral difficulties that may hinder their learning or interaction within the educational setting.

b. Group Counseling

As Al-Hadidi (2013) noted, group counseling is one of the fundamental approaches in psychological guidance. It involves organizing counseling sessions for groups of students facing similar challenges or difficulties. These sessions are facilitated by a professional counselor who guides and moderates the group's interactions to provide psychological support, enhance social interaction skills, and boost participants' capacity to cope with challenges both in and out of school contexts.

c. Family Counseling

According to Al-Khatib (2012), family counseling is a structured professional process aimed at supporting family members in understanding themselves and their interpersonal relationships, while working towards family balance and harmony. This is achieved by improving communication within the family, learning conflict resolution strategies, and appropriately distributing familial roles to strengthen the psychological well-being of the family as a cohesive unit.

Al-Khatib (2012) states that this type of counseling includes providing support to parents in dealing with their children, developing positive parenting skills, and resolving family conflicts—particularly those that negatively affect children's academic performance or social behavior. It also offers a safe space for emotional expression and the rebuilding of trust among family members, thereby contributing to improved emotional balance and affective cohesion within the family.

d. Play Therapy

According to Sadeq Kifah (2010), play therapy is a psychological treatment approach that utilizes symbolic or interactive activities and games as an indirect means to help children express their emotions and thoughts, and explore their problems in a safe and comfortable environment. This form of counseling aims to enhance children's self-understanding and to develop their personal and social skills within a structured and supervised framework led by a counselor or therapist.

Sadeq Kifah (2010) further explains that various forms of play are employed within this framework, including symbolic play (such as role-playing with toys), sand and water play, drawing, coloring, and role enactment. This type of counseling helps reduce anxiety,

foster self-confidence, improve social interaction skills, and modify behavior in children who experience stress, learning difficulties, or adjustment disorders.

e. Educational and Psychological Counseling

According to Al-Karyouti (2010), educational and psychological counseling is a structured professional process aimed at helping students understand themselves and the problems they face, while promoting their adjustment to the academic and social environment. This is achieved through comprehensive counseling services that address emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects, within a framework that respects the student's privacy and based on confidentiality, acceptance, and mutual respect.

Al-Karyouti (2010), further emphasized that the coordination between educational and psychological roles within the school is crucial for improving students' academic and psychological adjustment, particularly when intervention programs are tailored to individual needs and academic pressures.

f. Extracurricular Educational Activities

As Al-Rouwaished (2004) stated, extracurricular educational activities are a collection of educational programs and practices conducted outside of formal classroom settings. These activities aim to nurture learners' emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development through various domains, including sports, theater, science clubs, volunteer work, educational trips, and environmental initiatives.

These activities serve as an extension of the formal curriculum, enhancing its effectiveness and contributing to holistic and integrated education.

Extracurricular and especially cultural and sports activities play a crucial role in supporting students' mental health by providing a positive space for self-expression and emotional release. They also promote social engagement, helping build self-confidence and adaptation skills within the school context.

In this regard, Al-Rabee (2011) emphasized that such activities are instrumental in alleviating psychological stress and achieving emotional balance through non-traditional learning experiences that support students' psychological and social development.

Zaytoun (2005) argues that extracurricular educational activities particularly sports and cultural programs play a central role in promoting students' mental health. These activities provide a positive environment for self-expression and the release of tensions and emotions related to academic life. Moreover, they enhance opportunities for effective social interaction, thereby contributing to the development of self-confidence and the improvement of students' adaptive skills within the school environment.

2- Method and Tools:

2.1. Research Methodology

The choice of the research methodology is determined by the nature of the topic. Given that the current study aims to explore the various psychological and pedagogical support strategies provided to first-year middle school students from the perspective of educational and vocational guidance counselors, the exploratory descriptive method was adopted. This method allows for the accurate description of the phenomenon under investigation.

2.2. Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used as the main data collection tool in this study. Interviews were conducted with a sample of educational and vocational guidance counselors, focusing on three main dimensions:

- Dimension One: Psychological Problems

This dimension addressed the psychological challenges faced by first-year middle school students, identifying four primary issues: low self-esteem, difficulty interacting with others, anxiety, stress, and depression.

- Dimension Two: Psychological Support Strategies

This dimension explored the psychological support strategies employed by counselors, including: individual counseling, group counseling, family counseling sessions, and play therapy.

- Dimension Three: Pedagogical Support Strategies

This dimension addressed strategies aimed at alleviating academic pressure and enhancing student adaptation. These include: enhancing psychological and social adjustment, helping students cope with academic stress, improving communication skills, developing time management skills, and supporting students in overcoming personal and social difficulties.

2.3 Psychometric Properties of the Instrument

Following the development of the interview guide, which consisted of targeted questions directed at school and vocational guidance counselors, the tool was submitted to a panel of five academic experts from the University of El Oued for validation. Their feedback was used to assess the tool's reliability and validity, following the approach proposed by Obeidat et al. (2004). The results are as follows:

a. Content Validity

Mohamed Ibrahim (2016) stated that content validity can be assessed through two main approaches: the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach. The latter goes beyond subjective judgment and involves conducting statistical calculations based on the opinions of experts and evaluators, utilizing mathematical models to determine the extent of content validity. One such model is Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR). This process entails a systematic review of expert evaluations to ensure that each item and its corresponding response options adequately represent the specified dimensions of the theoretical construct and reflect the intended measurement domain. By applying Lawshe's (1975) formula to each item, the resulting CVR values ranged between (0.65- 0.82), indicating acceptable levels of content validity. The overall CVR value reached (0.84), which according to Lawshe's criteria, is considered acceptable and thus confirms that the instrument possesses a satisfactory degree of content validity.

b. Reliability

Bias was examined through a review of the items included in the instrument, ensuring that the questions were neither ambiguous nor biased toward a particular group. The phrasing of the questions was confirmed to be clear and comprehensible to respondents. Furthermore, consistency in responses to questions targeting the same theoretical construct was assessed. The majority of participants demonstrated uniform patterns in their answers, indicating a high level of response homogeneity, which suggests internal consistency.

Following this, the textual responses provided by expert reviewers were coded, and inter-rater agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. The resulting Kappa values ranged between (0.62 - 0.73), which are considered acceptable levels of agreement. These findings support the reliability of the instrument.

2.4 Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of 122 educational and vocational guidance counselors working in middle schools in the city of El Oued. A simple random sample of 42 counselors

was selected, representing 34.42% of the total population. This distribution is shown in the table below:

Table 1: Sample Representation Relative to the Study Population

Study Population	Sample Size	Representation Rate
122	42	34.42%

As shown in Table 1, the sample represents 34.42% of the total study population. This proportion indicates that the selected sample is sufficiently representative of the original population.

3- Results and Discussion

3.1 Discussion of the First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis states that: “First-year middle school students face psychological problems from the perspective of school and vocational guidance counselors.”

This hypothesis was measured using frequencies and percentages, as shown in the table below:

Table (02): Psychological Problems among First-Year Middle School Students From the Perspective of School and Vocational Guidance Counselors

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Low self-confidence	30	71.42%
Difficulty interacting with others	24	57.14%
Anxiety and stress	14	33.33%
Depression	02	04.76%

As shown in Table (02), first-year middle school students experience various psychological problems according to the viewpoints of school and vocational guidance counselors, ranked from most to least prevalent. The primary problem faced is low self-confidence, with a percentage of 71.42%, followed by difficulty interacting with others at 57.14%, anxiety and stress at 33.33%, and finally depression at 4.76%.

These relative estimates reflect the prevalence of certain psychological issues among first-year middle school students, as observed by school and vocational guidance counselors. These issues can be interpreted in light of the developmental stage the students are undergoing -transitioning from childhood to adolescence -which includes psychological, social, and academic changes. The findings can be explained as follows:

- Low self-confidence (71.42%):

This high percentage indicates that most students at this stage suffer from a lack of self-confidence, which is common at the beginning of middle school as students move from a familiar (elementary) environment to a new, more challenging one. This shift may lead to feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt, especially amidst developmental changes (both physical and psychological) at the onset of adolescence, social comparisons, school evaluations, and academic pressures.

- Difficulty interacting with others (57.14%):

A significant proportion of students struggle with social interaction and adjustment, which may reflect poor social adaptation and a lack of interpersonal skills within the classroom setting. Contributing factors might include weak communication skills, social withdrawal, shyness, or insecurity, and fear of rejection.

- Anxiety and stress (33.33%):

These issues appear to be moderately prevalent and may relate to pressures of adapting to a new educational stage, family and school expectations, fear of academic failure, or difficulty adjusting to new teaching methods and uncertain future expectations.

- Depression (4.76%):

Although relatively low, this percentage does not necessarily indicate a low prevalence of depression. It may instead reflect the challenges of identifying or reporting depressive symptoms, especially among children and adolescents. Depression at this age may manifest in indirect behaviors such as withdrawal or academic decline, making it harder to detect.

Overall, the data observed by guidance counselors indicate that first-year middle school students face a range of psychological challenges -most notably, issues related to self-confidence, social interaction, anxiety, and depression-. These problems can directly impact academic performance and psychosocial adjustment. These findings highlight the importance of early guidance intervention and the implementation of programs to develop psychological and social skills during this critical developmental stage and educational transition.

4.2 Presentation and Discussion of the Second Hypothesis

3.2 Discussion of the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis states that: “First-year middle school students receive various psychological support methods from the perspective of school and vocational guidance counselors.” This hypothesis was measured using frequencies and percentages, as shown in the following table:

Table (03): Psychological Support Methods for First-Year Middle School Students From the Perspective of School and Vocational Guidance Counselors

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Individual counseling	30	71.43%
Family counseling	25	59.52%
Group counseling	10	23.81%
Play therapy	09	21.43%

As shown in Table (03), first-year middle school students receive different psychological support methods according to the perspectives of school and vocational guidance counselors. These are ranked from most to least prevalent: individual counseling (71.43%), followed by family counseling (59.52%), then group counseling (23.81%), and finally play therapy (21.43%).

The data in Table (03) indicate a diversity of psychological support methods adopted by school and vocational guidance counselors for first-year middle school students, with four main approaches of varying frequency:

Individual counseling (71.43%) tops the list, reflecting the counselors’ recognition of the importance of direct, personal interaction with students. This method is a cornerstone of psychological counseling theories, especially the humanistic school represented by Carl Rogers, which views the individual as a unique being deserving of empathy and mutual respect in a counseling relationship.

Family counseling (59.52%) follows, aligning with contemporary perspectives in family psychology and systems theory, which emphasize that individual behavior cannot be separated from the family context. Involving the family in counseling enhances its effectiveness by fostering a deeper understanding of family dynamics influencing the student’s behavior -consistent with structural family counseling and multi-systemic approaches-.

Group counseling (23.81%) is identified as an effective method for developing social skills and reducing isolation, supported by Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, where modeling and observation within the group serve as vital psychological tools. Its limited use may be due to organizational or professional constraints, such as insufficient training or difficulties managing group sessions in schools.

Play therapy (21.43%) ranks last, despite strong support in child psychology literature - especially in the work of Melanie Klein and Virginia Axline- highlighting play's therapeutic role in expressing unconscious conflicts. This method is well-suited for younger students using nonverbal, play-based communication tools. The low percentage may reflect limited academic training or insufficient material and human resources for its effective application in schools.

3.3. Discussion of the Third Hypothesis

The third hypothesis states that: "First-year middle school students receive various pedagogical support methods from the perspective of school and vocational guidance counselors." This hypothesis was measured using frequencies and percentages, as presented below:

Table (04): Pedagogical Support Methods for First-Year Middle School Students From the Perspective of School and Vocational Guidance Counselors

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Guiding students to overcome personal and social difficulties	29	69.04%
Guiding students to manage school-related stress	22	52.38%
Guiding students in time management	16	38.09%
Guiding the student to improve communication with others	11	26.19%
Conducting extracurricular activities in the school environment	05	11.90%

The data in Table (04) show that first-year middle school students receive various pedagogical support methods according to school and vocational guidance counselors, ranked from most to least used:

Guiding students to overcome personal and social difficulties (69.04%) is the most commonly used approach, reflecting educational awareness of the importance of helping students adjust psychologically and socially to a new and potentially challenging school environment. This method aligns with humanistic counseling principles, which emphasize self-understanding and empowerment.

Guiding students to manage school-related stress (52.38%) follows, suggesting counselors' recognition of the daily tensions associated with academic demands, examinations, and interactions with peers and teachers. This method relies on positive coping skills and stress management, as emphasized in cognitive-behavioral counseling (CBC) models that help students reframe stressful situations and develop effective coping strategies.

Guiding students in time management (38.09%) ranks third, indicating an effort by educational institutions to instill organizational practices that support academic autonomy. Poor time management is often linked to low motivation and poor academic achievement, as discussed in educational psychology through concepts such as "self-efficacy" and "academic self-regulation."

Helping students improve communication with others (26.19%) ranks fourth and is crucial in fostering positive relationships with both peers and school staff. It is part of social skills emphasized by emotional intelligence theories (e.g., Goleman's model), which identify these skills as key predictors of academic success and social adaptation.

Conducting extracurricular activities (11.90%) is the least used method, despite strong educational and psychological literature recommending these activities for promoting student

development, reducing psychological stress, and enhancing school belonging and engagement. The limited use may be due to resource constraints or the lack of institutional culture supporting such practices.

3.4 Discussion of the Fourth Hypothesis

The third hypothesis states that: “Guidance counselors face various difficulties in providing psychological and pedagogical support to first-year middle school students.” This hypothesis was measured using frequencies and percentages, as shown below:

Table (05): Multiple Challenges Faced by Guidance Counselors in Providing Psychological and Pedagogical Support to First-Year Middle School Students

Type of Difficulty	Frequency	Percentage
Workload and lack of time	18	42.85%
Lack of resources	16	38.09%
Lack of parental cooperation with the counselor	14	33.33%
Lack of administrative cooperation with the counselor	13	30.95%
Lack of student cooperation with the counselor	06	14.28%

Table (05) reveals the various difficulties faced by guidance counselors in providing psychological and pedagogical support to first-year middle school students. These challenges are ranked from most to least prevalent. The most frequently reported difficulty is work pressure and lack of time, cited by 42.85% of respondents. This is followed by a lack of resources (38.09%), insufficient parental cooperation (33.33%), limited cooperation from school administration (30.95%), and finally, a lack of student cooperation, reported by 14.28% of the counselors.

The results presented in Table (05) highlight a range of challenges faced by school and vocational guidance counselors in providing psychological and pedagogical support to first-year middle school students. These challenges are ranked in order of frequency, from highest to lowest.

Foremost among these difficulties is work pressure and a lack of time, reported by 42.85% of respondents. This finding reflects the significant professional burden placed on counselors due to the intensity and multiplicity of their responsibilities. Professional literature identifies time constraints as one of the primary barriers to effective counseling practice. Studies on burnout and time management in educational settings emphasize that insufficient time for meaningful interaction with students hinders the delivery of deep, structured psychological and pedagogical support.

The second most reported challenge is the lack of resources, noted by 38.09% of respondents. This includes shortages in material, technical, and pedagogical tools necessary for implementing guidance programs. This issue is particularly concerning given the requirements of contemporary guidance theories especially the Comprehensive Guidance Services Model, which stresses the need for a supportive environment equipped with appropriate facilities and tools to facilitate effective counseling work.

Ranked third is the lack of parental cooperation, reported by 33.33% of counselors. This raises questions about the effectiveness of holistic student support. According to the triadic partnership model involving school, family, and the local community, successful counseling interventions depend on active engagement from all stakeholders especially parents, who play a central role in supporting students' psychological and behavioral development.

Next is the lack of cooperation from school administration, reported by 30.95% of participants. This indicates a potential gap in coordination between counselors and school leadership. Several studies suggest that the effectiveness of counseling services is strongly influenced by the degree to which school administrations are open to enabling counselors and integrating them into the pedagogical and administrative team.

Lastly, student reluctance or lack of cooperation was reported by 14.28% of counselors -the lowest percentage, yet still meaningful. This issue may stem from a lack of awareness about the importance of the counseling role, a lack of trust in the counselor, or prior psychological and social experiences that affect the counselor-student relationship. Theories of the counseling relationship, particularly Carl Rogers' humanistic approach, emphasize that building trust and openness with the student is a fundamental condition for the success of the counseling process.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to shed light on the role of psychological and pedagogical support provided to first-year middle school students, from the perspective of school and vocational guidance counselors. The study revealed that school and vocational guidance counselors play a pivotal role in supporting this student population by employing a variety of psychological and pedagogical counseling strategies. This reflects an advanced level of professional awareness and a readiness to provide comprehensive psychological support. However, the reality of day-to-day practice exposes significant challenges that hinder the effectiveness of counseling interventions, foremost among them work pressure, limited resources, and weak institutional and familial cooperation. These findings underscore the need for educational policy interventions aimed at creating a supportive environment that enables counselors to perform their duties with maximum effectiveness. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the guidance counselor's intervention remains contingent upon a set of objective conditions that restore the counselor's rightful role within the school system. These include:

- Redistributing tasks to reduce professional pressure and ensure adequate time for both individual and group support.
- Enhancing continuous training and supervision for counselors, particularly in techniques for working with transitional age groups.
- Strengthening psychological and pedagogical resources within educational institutions and increasing the budget allocated for psychological and pedagogical care in schools.
- Fostering a participatory culture involving counselors, school administrators, parents, and even students themselves.
- Integrating extracurricular activities thoughtfully into educational programs, given their role in reducing stress and promoting students' psychological and social development.
- Providing ongoing training for guidance counselors in modern psychological and pedagogical support techniques.
- Promoting collaboration between counselors, teachers, and parents to ensure the provision of effective psychological and pedagogical support for first-year middle school students.

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