Counselling to Youth a Priority in 21st Century: A Case Study of Mwenge Catholic University, Tanzania

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Abstract
This study examined students' perceptions of guidance and counselling services and the challenges they face at Mwenge Catholic University (MWECAU), Tanzania. It was guided by Person-Centered Therapy. An embedded mixed-methods research design was used, with greater emphasis on quantitative data. The target population comprised 1,000 third-year students and 50 students' representatives, making a total of 1,050. The sample included 150 third-year students through stratified random sampling, and 5 student representatives selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, while interview guide with student representatives. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analyzed through quotations and narrations. The findings showed that most students appreciated the university's proactive efforts to identify and support students in need, although a notable proportion perceived shortcomings including limited accessibility due to the location of counselling rooms, scheduling conflicts caused by counsellors' dual roles as lecturers and concerns about confidentiality and stigma. The study concluded that students generally considered counselling services valuable, effective, and important to their academic, personal, and mental well-being. However, challenges included the location of counselling rooms, counselors' competing teaching responsibilities, and concerns about confidentiality and stigma were observed. The study recommends locating counselling rooms in private, quiet, accessible areas and clearly displaying counselors' schedules.

Key words: Counselling, Youth, students representatives, counselors, 21st century

1. Introduction

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, value and attitudes though learning or experience ensuring the continuity and advancement of civilizations. The definition of education extends beyond the acquisition of information to include the cultivation of critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and ethical decision-making which seeks to empower individuals to become lifelong learners, adaptable to the challenges of a rapidly evolving world (Doharey at, el; 2023). The central purpose of education is to contribute to the cognitive development of an individual, advancement of society, and contribution to social, economic and political development of the nation. Students across all levels of education require effective guidance to achieve their individual aspirations as well as national development goals. However, the need for such guidance becomes even more critical among university students compared to primary and secondary school learners. This heightened necessity stems from the increased autonomy and independence that characterize university life, which often results in a lack of direct supervision and direction traditionally provided by parents and teachers during earlier educational stages.

Students meeting at the university from diverse backgrounds should have access to counseling services to ensure they can study effectively and cope with the challenges of personal independence, to reduce behaviour issues and disciplinary cases (Kumar and Singh, 2019). The counselling therefore has been identified as among the significant ways to protect the university students from the disruptive behaviour during their university life. In general, the purpose of counselling is to help individuals become useful people in their lives who have various insights, views, interpretations, choices, adjustments, and skills and are able to adjust to their environment (Wichgers et, al,: 2022). Counselling services have been introduced in all education institutions based on its rationale for the students to develop awareness of the goal of attending the particular level of education and improve the skills for social relationship among themselves and the new environment.

Therefore, counselling is focused on helping students with problems for the support and improvement (Patch & Middleton, 2018; Canu& Sitinjak (2023); Smith and Gillon, 2021; Vasiloglou et al., 2019), Sitinjak and Canu, (2023). The term is often used to serve different roles of students who are in a completely new environment, and where they have no control from parents or teachers, as is often the case in secondary schools. According to Vostanis & Bell (2020), counselling help people be aware of themselves, how they react to the environment and determine personal meaning for behavior, establish and classify goals and values for future behaviour. In the high learning institutions whereby students are in the age of adolescent and they are naturally need to try everything in the world counselling is very important to be effectively provided to bring the awareness of the students about the purpose of the being in such environment. Challenges student face in higher learning institutions are confronted with new

teaching methodologies such as assignments, article preparations, term papers, examinations, research paper presentations, and frequent quizzes designed to assess and evaluate their learned skills and knowledge (Arjanggi & Kusumaningsih, 2016). Collectively, these circumstances can take a ring on students' mental well-being, emotional and cognitive performance and may lead to heightened levels of psychological distress (Mboya, 2020; Alipio, 2020; Alfiyan et al., 2021).

Globally the challenges of high learning institutions of the students which need the counselling services persist as reported by different organizations and individual authors. According to the WHO's World Mental Health International College Student shows that, around 35% of first-year university students screen positive for at least one lifetime mental disorder, while 31% screen positive for at least one 12-month mental disorder (Auerbach et al, 2018). In the United Kingdom, Connell et al. (2007) found that the common problems presented by university students were academic issues or concerns (41%), low self-esteem (43%), depression (54%), and interpersonal problems (57%). Furthermore in Europian countries the university students observed to be in the condition which needs counselling to the higher degree for their survivor. Example the study shows that about 22.3% of university students report suicidal editions and frequently, students experience subclinical psychopathological symptoms and psychological problems (Becker et all and Mortier et all, 2018). The frequency of sexual harassment among university students in Italy was 38.3% among men and 44.2% among women in the last 12 months (Bastiani et al., 2019). In Saud Arabia the findings revealed that the prevalence of psycho-social problems included depressive symptoms, as high as 41.1%, anxiety symptoms at 26.9%, and stress symptoms at 22.4%. In Oman the studied shows that there is a great need to establish student counseling centers that offer a range of services to help students to adjust personally and academically to university life and promote improved mental health(Lawat and Alrajhi, 2018).

In Africa the studies also show the challenges face students in the university life in which the counseling was identified to help the students to cope with the new life in the universities. In Nigeria Abe (2012) the study shows that 54% of students were physically harassed, 43% were verbally harassed, and 5% experienced either rape and/or sexual assault. In Malawi the main behaviour patterns to universities students were stress (74.4%), depression (65.9%), and anxiety (63.9%), drug addiction (56.2%), loneliness (50.8%), sex related problems (44.6%), vandalism (36.5%), and suicide (33.3%) (Missanjo et al, 2021). Asante and Andoh-Arthur (2015) reported that the prevalence of depressive symptoms among university students in Ghana stood at 39.2%, with 31.1% having mild and moderate depressive symptoms and 8% having experienced severe depressive symptoms. In Tanzania, Onditi et al. (2024) shows that a substantial percentage (70%) of student- teachers at Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE) had experienced stressful situations during their time on campus, regardless of gender. According to TCU the enrolment trend in university increased from 117,652 students in 2018/2019 to 183,098 students in 2021/2022, statistics show 4,318 students were discontinued due to abscondment,

examination irregularities, disciplinary proceedings, and postponement of studies (TCU, 2022). The report by the UDSM established that the student population is experiencing various mental, psychological, and physiological challenges which necessitate counselling and rehabilitation services to help them achieve and maintain optimal functioning (UDSM, 2017).

There has been a growing need for an organized guidance and counselling services at MoCU resulting from growing need to encourage and facilitate students' academic, social, emotional and personal development (MoCU guidance and counselling Policy, 2021). The UDSM anti-sexual harassment policy and the counselling policy both acknowledge the prevalence of sexual harassment cases at the University of Dar es Salaam notably from male students to female students or from members of academic staff to students (UDSM, 2018a, 2018b). The study in two public universities in Tanzania shows that students had positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help for sexual harassment, followed by depression and romantic relationship difficulty which shows that university students placed a high value on seeking psychological help for sexual harassment than on depression and romantic relationship difficulty (Daudi et al, 2023). The guidance and counselling service is established in the different universities globally as well as Tanzanian contextual however the situation shows that not all student in Tanzanian university attended the services. The number of the challenges has been shown to be very high with the shown statistics but few students attended the service as revealed by different studies conducted in the Tanzanian context. The researchers were interested to find out the priority of university students in attending the counselling sessions when they face the challenges and therefore this study was conducted to explore the **Counselling to youth a priority in 21st century: A case study of Mwenge Catholic University, Tanzania**

2. Statement of the Problem

A study conducted in northern Tanzania revealed that 21.9% of university students (totaling 228 individuals) had contemplated serious self-harm in which the primary factors influencing these thoughts included depression, substance abuse, strained interpersonal relationships, and chronic mental or physical health conditions (Lugata et al., 2021).The mental health crisis among university students in Tanzania is particularly concerning, with studies indicating that approximately 70% of students experience mental health distress (Julius et al., 2024). Additionally, research shows high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress, affecting 81%, 74.7%, and 81.0% of university students, respectively (Rushashu & Makandala, 2023). The university student population has been rapidly increasing; enrollment grew from 117,652 students in the 2018/2019 academic year to 183,098 in 2021/2022. During this period, 4,318 students discontinued their studies due to abscondment. Moreover, over one-third of undergraduate students in non-medical universities in Tanzania suffer from depressive symptoms (Mwita et al., 2025). These statistics highlight a critical mental health crisis within Tanzanian

higher education institutions that necessitates urgent interventions to support and safeguard students' well-being.

Although university students in Tanzania face numerous challenges, including academic stress, mental health issues, and social difficulties, there remains a significant gap in the utilization of counseling services. For instance, the University of Dodoma has established counseling programs serving approximately 34,000 students; however, less than 100 students seek counseling services annually (Counseling and Guidance Office Data, UDOM, 2022), as cited by Owen (2022). Research by Mwaijande et al. (2020) revealed that only a small proportion of university students in Tanzania actively seek guidance and counseling services, despite reporting elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. The Tanzanian government has officially recognized the importance of providing counseling services (URT, 2017; 2019); however, empirical evidence shows that the actual number of students accessing these services remains alarmingly low. Further literature (Biswalo, 2017; Ochola, 2018; Kano, 2020; Sima, 2017; Aroko, 2021) confirms that, despite the availability of guidance and counseling programs in Tanzanian universities, the utilization rate among students remains inadequate. The discrepancy between the high incidence of mental health challenges and the low number of students seeking help highlights a critical issue that warrants further investigation. This situation has prompted researchers to explore students' perceptions of counseling services, with a specific focus on Mwenge Catholic University, to better understand the barriers and attitudes influencing service utilization among university students in Tanzania.

3. Research questions

1. What is the perception of students at Mwenge Catholic University towards the significance of counselling services in the 21st century?
2. What are the challenges facing students in accessing the counselling services at Mwenge Catholic university?

4. Significance of the Study

This study is highly significant to university management, students, and policymakers, as it offers valuable insights into supporting students in overcoming various challenges they face during their academic journey. It emphasizes the importance of equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to resist negative influences and successfully complete their studies, ultimately contributing positively to their communities. Through this research, students learn effective strategies for managing academic pressures, mental health issues such as depression, interpersonal relationships, and financial management, fostering resilience and personal growth. University management can utilize the findings to develop and implement comprehensive counseling services and awareness programs that facilitate students' adaptation to university life. Policymakers recognize the need to incorporate powerful guidance and

counseling provisions into university policies, ensuring students have access to professional support systems. Additionally, the study contributes to the Rogersian theory by highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive counseling approaches, encouraging students to participate freely in counseling sessions without fear of stigma. Overall, this research underscores the critical role of guidance and counseling in promoting student well-being and academic success, benefiting both individual students and institutional development.

5. Theoretical framework

Person-centered therapy, also referred to as non-directive, client-centered, or Rogerian therapy, was pioneered by Carl Rogers in the early 1940s. This form of psychotherapy is grounded in the idea that people are inherently motivated toward achieving positive psychological functioning. The client is believed to be the expert in their life and leads the general direction of therapy, while the therapist takes a non-directive rather than a mechanistic approach. The therapist's role is to provide a space conducive to uncensored self-exploration. As the client explores their feelings, they will gain a clearer perception of themselves, leading to psychological growth. The therapist attempts to increase the client's self-understanding by reflecting and carefully clarifying questions. Although few therapists today adhere solely to person-centered therapy, its concepts and techniques have been incorporated eclectically into many different types of therapists' practices.

The Rogersian approach emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment to facilitate open communication and personal growth. However, it is essential to recognize that clients may feel inhibited from fully expressing themselves due to gender dynamics with their counselor. Therefore, it is essential to have counselors of all genders within university counseling services to enable students to choose the counselor they feel most comfortable with, thereby promoting openness and honesty.

Literature review

Missanjo (2021) conducted a study study examined the perception of university and college students towards guidance and counselling services in Malawi. Specifically, the study addressed the behaviour patterns shown by students that require guidance and counselling, the benefits of guidance and counselling services to university and college students, the challenges faced in guidance and counselling services at universities and colleges and the strategies that can be employed to promote effective guidance and counselling services in universities and colleges. Data were collected using structured questionnaire. Simple random and proportional representation sampling techniques were used to select 258 students from various universities and colleges. The main behaviour patterns were stress (74.4%), depression (65.9%), and anxiety (63.9%). The other behaviour patterns identified includes: drug addiction (56.2%), loneliness

(50.8%), sex related problems (44.6%), vandalism (36.5%), and suicide (33.3%). However, the study was conducted in Malawi which could limit the reflection of how these issues are experienced within Tanzanian universities. In particular, there is limited institution-specific evidence on the priority given to counselling for youth, the accessibility and adequacy of services, and the challenges affecting their provision at Mwenge Catholic University. The present study addresses this contextual gap by examining counselling as a priority for youth in the 21st century at Mwenge Catholic University, Tanzania.

Rushahu (2022) conducted a study to explore the availability and challenges of guidance and counselling services provided to female postgraduate students at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. The sample size was twenty-two participants consisting of 14 female postgraduate students, six counselors and two officials from the Dean of Student's office. Interviews, focus group discussions and observations were used to gather qualitative data. According to the findings, the majority of the female postgraduate students face numerous obstacles in achieving their educational goals. Thus, more awareness ought to be raised on how to access the available counselling services within the campus. The study provided the light and recommendation of the currect study to identify a need to raise awareness about how students could access existing counselling services at MWECAU by examining the challenges the students face in accessing the guidence and counselling services at MWECA in the current study. Threfore the current study examine whether counselling is treated as a priority, what challenges young people experience, and what institutional measures could strengthen counselling services in the 21st century.

The study byAhmed (2015) conducted in Omdurman Islamic University, Khartoum State-Sudan. The study aimed to investigating the student perception toward psychological counseling services. Researchers used descriptive methods, by applied psychological counseling services questionnaire which designed by researchers. The community of this study consisted of (950) students. Sample was chosen randomly included (61) students included male (29) and female (32). The researcher used a number of statistical processes which are: T-test for one sample, T-test for independent sample, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Finally, the results are following: The level of psychological counseling services according to the view of Omdurman Islamic university student, is significant differences in view of students about psychological counseling services according to the gender, no significant differences in view of students about psychological counseling services according to the place of residence, no relationship between the view of students about psychological counseling services and age variable

A study by Shaheen et. Al.; (2023) conducted with the purpose of measuring the impact of Guidance and Counseling Services on students' Development at the University level at Islamabad. Student development was taken in three basic domains (academic, moral, and social development). Six research hypothesis were formulated in which the study was descriptive and a

survey method was used. The population of the study was all public and private university students in Islamabad. The stratified sampling technique was used. The sample was selected based on Krejcie and Morgan's sample size calculation. The sample comprised 900 hundred students who were selected from private universities.

A Self-developed questionnaire was used to collect the data. The study found that guidance and counselling services positively predicted students' academic, moral, and social development among university students in Islamabad. However, the study was conducted in Pakistan, so its findings may not reflect the cultural, institutional, and service-delivery context of Tanzanian universities. It also focused on broad student-development outcomes and little was done in examining whether counselling is a priority for youth, how students experience or access services, and what local barriers affect provision. Therefore the current study addresses this contextual gap by examining "Counselling to Youth a Priority in the 21st Century" at Mwenge Catholic University, Tanzania. It will provide institution-specific evidence on youth counselling needs, the status and accessibility of services, and challenges or strategies relevant to strengthening counselling in the Tanzanian university contex

Gwirayi (2024) conducted a study on students' perceptions of psychosocial support services at a university: A case of one university in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Ten participants (five males and five females) were purposively selected from a university in Masvingo. Interviews and focus group discussions were used as techniques for data collection. Thematic results indicated the presence of psychosocial support services such as peer counselling, peer education, pastoral counselling, academic counseling, health counselling, and support groups. Gender differences in the perceptions of psychosocial support were also noted.

The results showed that students spend most of their time on campus. The study provides limited evidence about how students understand counselling as a priority, which counselling needs students consider most important, and what factors influence their use of counselling services. Further, the study was conducted in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, so its findings reflect that institution's social, cultural, and higher-education context which limit its application to students at Mwenge Catholic University in Tanzania, where students' backgrounds, institutional counselling arrangements, and local conditions may differ. A contextual gap therefore exists in understanding how youth at Mwenge Catholic University perceive counselling, what support they need, and what barriers affect access to services. The present study addresses this gap by examining counselling as a priority for youth within the Tanzanian university context

6. Methodology

Embedded research design within the framework of mixed methods was employed, with a predominant emphasis on quantitative data over qualitative data. This study aimed to gather extensive insights from students regarding their perceptions of guidance and counseling services at Mwenge Catholic University. To achieve this, students from the three faculties were involved,

ensuring diverse and representative perspectives. Additionally, the insights of students representative were sought to corroborate and deepen the understanding of the students' perceptions. The target population was 1000 third year students from the 3 faculties and 50 students reperesentative which make a total of 1050 participants. The sample was comprises 155 participants, including 150 third year students from three faculties: Faculty of Education, Faculty of Humanities, and Faculty of Natural Sciences, and 5 students representative. The students are distributed equally across the faculties, with 50 students selected from each faculty, using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation, 5 students representative were selected through criterion purposive sampling based on the knowledge they had about the counselling services provided in the university. Data collection involved the use of questionnaires administered to the students to gather quantitative data, and an interview guide for the students representative to obtain qualitative insights, facilitating triangulation of the data. The instruments were validated by two experts, one from the Faculty of Education and another from the Faculty of Humanities to ensure their content validity and appropriateness for the study.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researchers aimed to explore students' perceptions of the counselling services provided at MWECAU, with the intention of gaining insights into their experiences and opinions to inform management strategies for service improvement. The focus was on understood how these services assist students in coping with various challenges related to health, decision-making, academic performance, and social life within the university environment. The data collected from student responses offer valuable perspectives, discussed and interpreted in the following section to highlight key findings and implications for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the counselling services.

The data indicates that majority of students recognize the importance of counselling services offered at their university, with 97 (95.1%) students strongly agreed and agreed with the statement. Conversely, a minimal number of students, 3 (2.9%), remain neutral, and 1 (1.0%) of student strongly disagrees or disagrees with the statement. This finding reflects that students are effectively accessing the support they need, which contribute to their overall well-being and academic success. The high level of support indicates that the university's counselling services are meeting students' expectations and needs, fostering an environment where students feel supported and valued.

Table 1. Response of students' perception on the guidance and counselling services at Mwenge Catholic University (n= 150)

Key: SA: strong Agree; A: Agree; UN: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strong Disagree

No.	Statement	SA		A		UN		D		SD	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
i.	I believe that counselling services offered at my university are important to students.	75	73.5	22	21.6	3	2.9	1	1	1	1
ii.	I consider counselling services to be helpful in solving personal problems.	51	50	48	47.1	7	6.9	3	2.9	0	0
iii.	Counselling services help students improve their academic performance.	46	45.1	47	46.1	7	.9	2	2	0	0
iv.	Counselling services support students' personal growth and development	46	45.1	46	45.1	5	4.9	4	3.9	1	1
v.	Counselling services help students manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional problems	66	64.7	27	26.5	8	7.8	1	1	0	0
vi.	I appreciate the role of counselling services in promoting students' mental health and well-being.	57	55.9	35	34.3	5	4.9	5	4.9	0	0
vii.	I feel comfortable seeking counselling services whenever I need support	32	31.4	52	51	11	10.8	6	5.9	1	1
viii.	I am aware of the counselling services available at my university	27	26.5	54	52.9	14	13.7	5	4.9	2	2
ix.	I believe that counselling services are confidential and can be trusted	48	47.1	37	36.3	12	11.8	5	4.9	0	0
x.	Counselling services encourage students to make positive decisions about their lives and studies.	54	52.9	45	44.1	3	2.9	0	0	0	0

The findings supported by Rumani (2025) that students positively perceive that seeking help from the unit of guidance and counselling is beneficial. This findings shows that whenever the counselling service is being provided in a good quality students are willing to attend and helped to solve their challenges. The findings are concurs with the data from the face to face interview with students who explained on how they perceive the counselling services offered at MWECAU. The students C had this to say:

> In our course the lecturers awarded very low marks in the coursework when we were in first year and we were very stressed but one of our fellow advise us to go to the counselling department. The counsellor directed us to the right person and she tried to make the follow-up whether we were helped or not. The service is very important but the orientation is very necessary more than once for more information.

> Student A when was asked on his perception on the counselling service in the university revealed that: counselling service in MWECAU is available and most of the students use the services because some students are suffering from many challenges including academic, economic and social interaction in the university.

The quantitative and qualitative findings shows that the students believe that the counselling service provided in the university is important to them since it help to solve their challenges during the university studies. Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that students value the counselling services offered at MWECAU. Students described receiving guidance and follow-up for academic, social, and economic challenges, and viewed the services as helpful during their studies. They also emphasized the need for repeated orientation to ensure students know how to access counselling. Overall, the findings suggest that counselling supports students' well-being and academic experience, while greater awareness may encourage more students to use the services.

The data in Table 1 reveals that majority of students agreed and strongly agreed that counselling services as beneficial in addressing personal issues. Specifically, 101(93.4%) students strongly agreed and agreed, while a small number of students 7 (6.9%), remain neutral, and smaller number 3 (2.9%) students disagree or strongly disagree, that counselling services was helpful in solving personal problems. These findings indicate that most students find counselling services to be a valuable resource for resolving personal problems, reflecting their trust and reliance on the support offered by the university. The low percentage of disagreement indicates minimal doubt or dissatisfaction with the services. Overall, these findings underscore the perceived effectiveness of counselling. During the face to face interview with the students, they had more to reveals especially for those who have being attending the counselling service in the university: Student A had this to say:

> I was stressed after I lend my friend certain amount of money which I was supposed to pay for the tuition fee and he refused to return it back, the only person who gave me the hope was a counsellor because I explained the full scenario to her. I thank the counsellor for her directives although the money was not returned but I was able to proceed with my studies until now I am in third year.

The interview with students B who had not attended the counselling services but had some information from the colleague who had attended the service explained that: *my friend attended the counselling after being pregnant by his course mate and the man refused to take care of the pregnancy completely and she was helped to live with hope in the situation of her expected baby.* Based on these findings from the qualitative and quantitative shows that the counselling service is available and rationale to the individual students in MWECAU. Students recognise the importance of the counselling services offered in the university and they use it when needed.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge to show that students regard MWECAU's counselling services as helpful in addressing personal problems. Students' accounts illustrate how counselling provided guidance, hope, and emotional support during difficult situations, even when the underlying problem could not be resolved. These experiences, together with students' positive survey responses, suggest that the service is a valued resource that students use or

recommend when support is needed. The findings also show that the perceived value of counselling extends beyond students who have attended sessions: students may learn about the service through their peers and recognize its potential to support others facing personal challenges. This alignment between survey responses and interview accounts highlights the importance of maintaining accessible counselling and ensuring that students are aware of how to seek support.

The data from Table 1 indicates a strong positive perception of the counselling services among students at MWECAU, with 91.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that these services contribute to improving their academic performance. This overwhelming majority suggests that the students recognize and value the role of counselling in enhancing their academic success. Such high endorsement may reflect the effectiveness of the counselling programmes, the relevance of the support provided, and students' appreciation of the assistance in overcoming academic challenges. The perception that counselling services are beneficial can also enhance student engagement with these services, creating a supportive academic environment conducive to better performance and overall student well-being.

On the other hand, the 8.8% of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement highlight that there is still a minority of students who do not perceive the counselling services as beneficial to their academic performance. This minority could be due to various reasons such as lack of awareness, personal preferences, or differing experiences with the counselling process. Their responses point to the need for the university to explore the reasons behind their dissatisfaction or disinterest, and to consider strategies to make the services more accessible, tailored, or effective for all students. Also data in table 1 revealed that 90.2% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that counselling services support students' personal growth and development while the 4.9% were neutral and disagreed with the statement. During the interview, Student A, who serves as a class representative, stated that: *I observed several students receiving support from the counsellor after missing classes and failing to attend tests. These students were instructed to report to the counsellor daily, both before and after classes, throughout the entire semester.* However, Student B remarked that:

The university counsellor plan important role, especially during the first year when students are adjusting to a new environment and experiencing a high level of independence, which can adversely affect their academic performance. He observed that some students who were referred to the counsellor and the dean of students due to persistent absenteeism showed significant improvement over time. Currently, these students are now in their third year, indicating positive outcomes resulting from the support provided. The findings are related to those of Shaheen et. al.; (2023) that Guidance and Counselling services were a significant predictor of students' academic, moral, and social development.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge in showing that counselling services can support students' personal development and help address challenges that affect their academic progress. Students' positive perceptions of counselling are reflected in the interview accounts of students who received continued support after missing classes and tests, as well as those who struggled to adjust to university life. The reported improvements among some students suggest that counselling can help them develop better routines, adapt to their environment, and re-engage with their studies. At the same time, the findings indicate that counselling experiences may differ: some students may not find the services helpful or suitable for their needs. This points to the importance of understanding students' varied experiences and making support more accessible and responsive.

The data from Table 1 demonstrates that majority of students at MWECAU, accounting for 91.2%, recognize the valuable role of counselling services in helping them manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional problems. This high level of agreement and strong agreement suggests that students view these services as effective and essential for addressing their mental health needs. It reflects a positive perception of the counselling program's ability to provide emotional support, which is crucial for maintaining overall well-being and academic performance. Such a strong endorsement indicates that the counselling services are meeting a vital need among students and are likely contributing to a healthier, more balanced student community. Conversely, the 9.8% of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed signals that a small proportion of the student population may not find the counselling services as helpful or may have unmet needs. This dissent could stem from various factors, such as stigma, lack of awareness, or dissatisfaction with the services offered. Their responses highlight the importance of continuous assessment and improvement of counselling programs to ensure they are accessible, culturally sensitive, and tailored to diverse student needs. Student A recognizes the valuable role of counselling services in helping students manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. During the interview, she expressed her thoughts in a face-to-face conversation, stating: *Counselling services have really helped me cope with the pressure and emotional difficulties I faced, especially during exam periods. Talking to the counsellor made me feel supported and more capable of handling my stress.* The findings reflect the empirical study conducted in Oman which shows that there is a great need to establish student counselling canters that offer a range of services to help students to adjust personally and academically to university life and promote improved mental health (Lawat and Alrajhi, 2018).

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge in showing that students recognize counselling services as a source of support for managing stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. The survey responses indicate that most students viewed the services positively, while Student A's account helps explain this perception: she described how speaking with a counsellor helped her feel supported and better able to cope, particularly during examinations. Together, these findings indicate that counselling can provide students with practical and

emotional support during difficult periods and may help them manage challenges that affect their well-being and studies. However, the responses from students who disagreed or strongly disagreed show that this support may not meet everyone's needs.

The data from Table 1 highlights that a majority of students at MWECAU, specifically 82.4%, feel comfortable seeking counselling services whenever they need support. This high percentage indicates that most students trust and feel at ease accessing social welfare service resources, which is essential for encouraging active utilization of counselling services. Feeling comfortable is a key factor in ensuring that students seek help early, thereby preventing the escalation of emotional, social or psychological issues. The positive perception of accessibility and approachability of counselling services reflects well on the university's efforts to create a supportive and stigma-free environment for students to address their mental health concerns. However, the data also shows that 10.8% of students are neutral, and 6.9% strongly disagree with the statement that they feel comfortable seeking counselling services whenever they need support, signifying that a notable minority does not feel as comfortable seeking support from counselling services. The neutral responses suggest some students may be uncertain or have reservations about accessing these services, while those who strongly disagree may face barriers such as fear of stigma, lack of awareness, or dissatisfaction with the services. Students feel comfortable seeking counselling services whenever they need support. To triangulate the information student B revealed that:

> We had an orientation on the benefits of the counselling services available at the university, and we are very free among those who attended the sessions. The counsellor providing the service is a sister and a lecturer who taught us in class, and she is very friendly, which makes us feel at ease to approach her whenever needed.

This statement shows that orientation sessions helped students understand the benefits of the university's counselling services and feel more comfortable using them. Students also described the counsellor as approachable and friendly, which appears to make seeking support easier. The familiarity with students as both a lecturer and counsellor may build trust for some, although universities should also protect confidentiality and ensure students feel free to seek support without concern about their academic relationship. The findings generally imply that students' comfort in seeking counselling at MWECAU was supported by awareness of the available services and positive interactions with an approachable counsellor. Orientation helps students understand the benefits of counselling, while the counsellor's friendly manner encourages them to seek support when needed.

In other hand the data in Table 1 shows that 69. 4% of students agreed or strongly agreed that students are aware of the counselling services available at the university, while 13.7% were neutral and 6.9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. These data highlight

the overall effectiveness of the university's communication efforts in promoting counselling services, although there remains a small segment that may require targeted informational interventions to enhance their awareness. During face-to-face interactions, students demonstrated varying levels of awareness regarding the counselling services at MWECAU. While some students were knowledgeable about the availability of these services, others lacked awareness or were unaware of the location of the counselling room. For instance, Student D, when asked about her awareness of the counselling services, stated:

> Since I started the first year at MWECAU, I haven't encountered any challenges that would require me to attend counselling, bur I am familiar with the direction of the counselling room and I have heard about the services provided at the university.

This response indicates a general awareness of the existence of counselling services, despite limited familiarity with specific details such as the location, highlighting the need for targeted dissemination of information to enhance student familiarity with available mental health resources. Student C started that:

The majority of students appear to be aware of the counselling services primarily due to the orientation sessions provided upon their initial registration in the first year. However, this level of awareness may be insufficient, as students who report late or miss the orientation may not be adequately informed about the available support services. Consequently, there is a need for ongoing informational strategies beyond initial orientation, such as organizing additional workshops or seminars, to continuously raise awareness about counselling services within the university community. Implementing these initiatives would ensure that all students, regardless of their reporting time, are adequately informed and encouraged to utilize services when needed. The quantitative and qualitative findings converge to show that most students are aware of counselling services at MWECAU, although their knowledge varies. Some students know that the services are available but are less familiar with details such as the location of the counselling room. Overall, the findings indicate that orientation helps raise awareness, but ongoing communication such as regular reminders, workshops, or seminars could ensure that all students know how to access counselling support when needed.

The data from Table 1 shows that a significant majority of students at MWECAU, specifically 81.4%, believe that counselling services are confidential and can be trusted. This high level of trust is essential for encouraging students to seek help, as confidentiality is often a key factor influencing their willingness to access mental health support. When students feel confident that their privacy will be maintained, they are more likely to discuss sensitive issues openly and honestly, which can lead to more effective counselling outcomes. However, the data also indicates that 11.8% of students remain neutral regarding the confidentiality of counselling services, and 4.9% disagreed with the statement. These finding shows that, a small portion of students had concerns or uncertainties about the privacy and trustworthiness of the services

provided. These perceptions could stem from a lack of information or general stigma associated with counselling services support. To triangulate the information, Student A was asked to share his understanding of confidentiality regarding the counselling services provided at MWECAU and he stated that: *from his first year to the present, he has not heard any rumours or reports concerning the students' information following counselling sessions.* Student D was asked to share her experience, and she stated: *I have never heard any complaints from students regarding the leakage of counselling information.* These responses with the quantitative findings imply a positive perception among students regarding the confidentiality practices of the counselling services at MWECAU, which may contribute to students' confidence and willingness to seek counselling when needed.

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that a substantial majority of students 97% either agree or strongly agree that counselling services play a great role in encouraging students to make positive decisions regarding their lives and academic pursuits. This high percentage reflects a strong perceived value of the counselling services within the student community, suggesting that most students recognize and appreciate the impact these services have on fostering personal development and responsible decision-making. During the face to face interview students had this to say:

Student A expressed a strong belief in the effectiveness of counselling services, stating, *counselling has really helped him to clarify his goals and make better decisions about the future. He added that I feel more confident about my choices because of the support I received.*

Student B noted: *I think counselling services are very beneficial*. *They have encouraged me to focus on my strengths and make informed decisions about my studies and social interaction*.

Student C shared: *Through counselling, I have gained better understanding of my challenges and learned how to overcome them, which has motivated me to pursue my goals*. The study by Doharey at el. (2023) show that ethical decision-making which seeks to empower individuals to become lifelong learners, adaptable to the challenges of a rapidly evolving world is among the task of counselling services.

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data at MWECAU reveal that counselling services are highly valued and perceived as effective by students in supporting their academic, personal, and mental health needs. A majority of students express strong agreement that these services help them manage stress, emotional challenges, and make positive decisions, with over 90% endorsing their usefulness in various aspects of student life. Overall, the data points out that counselling service are an essential component of student support, fostering a healthy, supportive environment conducive to academic success and personal growth. The findings are online with Julius et al., (2024) that mental health crisis among university students in Tanzania is particularly concerning, with studies indicating that approximately 70% of students experience mental health distress in Tanzania.

Table 2. Response of students' perception on the challenges students face in accessing the guidance and counselling services at Mwenge Catholic University (n= 150)

S/n	Statements	SA		A		UN		D		SD	
		f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
i.	I find it difficult to access counselling services when I need them	18	17.6	34	33.3	15	14.7	26	25.5	7	6.9
ii.	Fear that my personal information may not remain confidential discourages me from seeking counselling services.	22	21.6	45	44.1	10	9.8	17	16.7	6	5.9
iii.	The stigma associated with receiving counselling prevents students from seeking counselling services.	16	15.7	36	35.3	24	23.5	17	16.7	7	6.9
iv.	I am well informed about the counselling services available at the university.	30	29.4	36	35.3	17	16.7	13	12.7	4	3.9
v.	The university has enough counsellors to meet students' counselling needs.	18	17.6	32	31.4	16	15.7	24	23.5	10	9.8
vi.	The counselling facilities available at the university are adequate to serve students effectively	18	17.6	30	29.4	19	18.6	30	29.4	3	2.9
vii.	Cultural, religious, or social beliefs discourage some students from seeking counselling services.	28	27.5	38	37.3	10	9.8	18	17.6	6	5.9
viii.	Counselling services are easily accessible in terms of location, operating hours, and appointment procedures	23	22.5	38	37.3	14	13.7	19	18.6	6	5.9
ix.	Delays in obtaining counselling appointments discourage students from using counselling services.	25	24.5	42	41.2	21	20.6	8	7.8	4	3.9
x.	The university actively identifies and supports students who need counselling even if they do not seek help voluntarily.	20	19.6	31	30.4	19	18.6	15	14.7	14	13.7

Key: SA: strong Agree; A: Agree; UN: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strong Disagree

Data in Table 2 indicates that a moderate of students, 50.9%, either agreed or strongly agreed that accessing counselling services when needed is not difficult. This implies that half of the student population perceives the availability and accessibility of counselling services as satisfactory, reflecting positively on the institution's counselling support systems. Conversely, 14.7% of students remained undecided, indicating uncertainty or neutrality regarding the ease of accessing such services. This neutrality suggests a lack of sufficient information or inconsistent experiences among students.

More concerning is that 32.4% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that accessing counselling services when needed is difficult, implying that a considerable proportion of the student perceives accessing counselling services as challenging. This dissent highlights potential barriers or inadequacies within the current counselling framework, such as limited availability, stigma, or lack of awareness. The finding highlights a need for the institution to evaluate and enhance its counselling services to ensure they are

genuinely accessible and responsive to students' needs. Improving outreach, reducing stigma, and increasing resource availability could address the concerns raised by nearly one-third of the students. Eventually, fostering a supportive environment for personal development is essential for students' overall well-being and academic success. During face-to-face interviews with students regarding the reasons why counselling services are difficult to access, they provided various responses. Student D mentioned that:

> The university has two counsellors, one of whom is also a lecturer. When a student needs a counselling session, sometimes the counsellor is in class, either lecturing or invigilating an exam. I believe this is the main issue. Although there are two counsellors, one of them is also a lecturer and is often busy with classes, which makes it difficult for students to get timely support.

Student B revealed that:

> Students are very selective because there are two counsellors but I think most of them are interested to attend the counselling session to the male counsellor who is a lecturer and sometimes is not available in the office all the time.

Student C stated that:

> Prior to the current counsellor, there was a previous counsellor who was often unavailable in the office. Currently, there are two counsellors one is a lecturer, and the other is dedicated solely to counselling. Most of the time, the counsellor is available in the office. However, the fact that the lecturer also serves as a counsellor makes it difficult for students to access counselling services, as their availability is limited by teaching commitments.

The findings are online with Panford-Quainoo, et al. (2024) that counsellors are facing several challenges including role conflict, work overload, deficient resources, as well as negative perceptions of counselling.

Collectively, these findings indicate that limited availability and scheduling conflicts of counsellors particularly those with teaching responsibilities pose substantial barriers to students seeking counselling services. The quantitative and qualitative findings converge to suggest that students' experiences of accessing counselling services at MWECAU are mixed. While some students find the services accessible, others report difficulties obtaining timely support. Interviews help explain these challenges by showing that one counsellor has teaching and examination duties, which limit availability, and students may prefer a particular counsellor who is not always available. Although a dedicated counsellor is often present, students' access may still depend on counsellor availability and preference. These findings implies that workload, limited resources, and negative perceptions of counselling as challenges for counsellors

The data presented in Table 2 reveals that majority of students, 65.7%, either agreed or strongly agreed that the confidentiality of their personal information do not frighten them from seeking counselling services. This positive perception indicates that most students trust the confidentiality measures in place, which is essential for encouraging utilization of welfare

support services. However, 9.2% of students remained undecided, suggesting a degree of uncertainty or doubt regarding their concerns about confidentiality. This neutrality may reflect a lack of clear information about confidentiality policies or inconsistent experiences that leave students unsure about whether their sensitive information would be protected. More notably, 22.6% of students either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, indicating a substantial proportion that fears that their personal information might not remain confidential if they access these services. This percentage of students expressing concern poses considerable implications for the effectiveness of the counselling program. If nearly a quarter of students distrust the confidentiality of counselling services, they may be less likely to seek help when needed, which could impede their welfare and academic performance.

The percentage of students who are undecided or disagree about confidentiality issues highlights the importance of improving communication about privacy policies, ensuring strict confidentiality protocols, and fostering trust in the counselling services. Addressing these concerns is very important to reduce barriers to access and to promote a supportive environment where students feel safe to seek help without fear of breaches of confidentiality. Enhancing these aspects could lead to increased utilization of counselling services, ultimately supporting students' mental health and well-being.

This findings from the quantitative approach lead the researchers to find the detailed information on the confidentiality issues on the counselling services offers at MWECAU and therefore the interview was done with the students who chosen purposively for more clarification and the students revealed several answers. The student E said that*: I never heard the leakages of any information from the counsellors after the session.* And the student B revealed that: *this is not true that the counsellors disclose the information of the students who attended the counselling session because I never heard it.* When student D was asked concerning the confidentiality issues he also had this to say: *confidentiality is highly considered by the counsellors because I never heard any information of the student after the counselling session although I never attended any counselling session.*

This discrepancy of few students in the quantitative findings implies that, despite overall high degree of agreement on the statement of confidentiality, some students either experienced contraventions of confidentiality or felt insecure about the privacy of their disclosures. It highlights the importance for counsellors to ensure clear communication of confidentiality policies and consistently reinforce trust, so that all students feel confident that their sessions are private and protected. Addressing these concerns could help to further strengthen students' trust in the counselling process and ensure a more uniformly positive perception of confidentiality.

However, one student's view was based on hearsay rather than personal experience, and the interviews do not establish that every student feels equally secure. The difference between the survey responses and interview accounts reflect varying levels of awareness, trust, or personal experience. These findings highlight the importance of clearly explaining confidentiality policies and consistently protecting students' information so that all students feel safe seeking support.

The data presented in Table 2 provides an insightful overview of students' perceptions regarding the impact of stigma on the utilization of counselling services. A average, 51% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that stigma does not serve as a barrier to seeking counselling, indicating a relatively positive shift in attitudes towards mental health services within the student population.

This suggests that more than half of the students perceive stigma as a minimal or non-existent obstacle, which could be reflective of increased awareness, education, or normalization of mental health issues. Furthermore, an equivalent percentage (23.5%) of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, indicating that nearly a quarter of the participants perceive stigma as a deterrent to seeking counselling services. This indicates that perceptions about stigma and cultural barriers to accessing counselling services are divided among the students. While half of the students see stigma and cultural factors as significant obstacles preventing them from seeking help, the other half does not view these factors as barriers.

The findings concur with the study by (Biswalo, 2017; Ochola, 2018; Kano, 2020; Sima, 2017; Aroko, 2021) who confirms that, despite the availability of guidance and counselling programs in Tanzanian universities, the utilization rate among students remains inadequate. This implies the variability in experiences or perceptions, some students may feel that societal attitudes and cultural norms hinder their willingness to access counselling, whereas others may not see these issues as relevant or impactful. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to address stigma and cultural barriers for those who perceive them as obstacles, while also understanding the factors that enable others to access services comfortably. This subset highlights the persistent presence of stigma as a barrier within the student community, emphasizing the need for continued stigma reduction initiatives and mental health literacy programs.

The data presented in Table 2 provides insights into students' perceptions of the adequacy of counselling facilities at the university. A total of 47% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that the counselling facilities are sufficient to serve students effectively. This suggests that nearly half of the student population perceives the available counselling services as adequate, reflecting a generally positive view of the facilities. Conversely, 32.3% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, indicating that a significant portion of the student doubts the effectiveness or sufficiency of the counselling facilities. This sizable minority highlights potential concerns regarding the quality, accessibility, or capacity of the counselling services, which may impact students' willingness to seek help or their overall well-being. Additionally, 18.6% of students remained neutral, perhaps indicating uncertainty or a lack of sufficient information about the counselling facilities' effectiveness. This group's ambivalence underscores the importance of transparent communication and possibly further evaluation of counselling services.

From a research perspective, these findings show a divided perception among students regarding the adequacy of counselling facilities. While nearly half view the services positively, a substantial proportion expresses doubt or dissatisfaction. This divergence points to the need for the university to assess the actual quality and capacity of its counselling facilities and consider improvements or awareness campaigns to better meet students' needs. During the face-to-face discussion with Student B, the response highlighted that:

> Having the counsellor also serve as a lecturer creates the impression that, the office is primarily equipped with teaching facilities rather than dedicated counselling resources. The student shared that they had visited the counsellor's office and found that it does not resemble a typical counselling room. Instead, the space is situated near other offices and lacks the necessary privacy and confidentiality essential for effective counselling sessions. The office is accessible to many students seeking help for various academic challenges, it become difficult for students to feel comfortable and secure while discussing sensitive issues.

The empirical studied concur with the finding of the study based on the challenges of the facilities for counselling services in the university as revealed by Missanjo (2021) that challenges faced in providing guidance and counselling services at universities and colleges are lack of specific time allocation, inadequate facilities, and number of counsellors is not proportional with number of students, and in other institutions there is no guidance and counselling services. Rogers' person-centred theory (1940) revealed that inadequate time allocation, insufficient facilities, and too few counsellors may limit the opportunity to build the trusting, supportive relationships central to this approach. The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data reveal that the counsellors' office lacks the necessary facilities for effective counselling. This deficiency is primarily because the counsellor is also a lecturer, leading to the office being primarily designated for teaching activities rather than dedicated counselling services. As a result, students do not have access to a private, well-equipped space for confidential and focused counselling sessions. This situation hampers students' ability to seek support comfortably and highlights the need for a separate, appropriately equipped counselling environment to better address students' mental health needs.

The data presented in Table 2 sheds light on the influence of cultural, religious, or social beliefs on students' willingness to seek counselling services. A majority (60.8%) of students either agreed or strongly agreed that these beliefs act as a barrier, discouraging some students from accessing counselling. This indicates that cultural and social factors play a substantial role in shaping students' attitudes towards counselling services support, potentially hindering their willingness of the students to seek help when needed. On the other hand, 23.5% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, suggesting that nearly a quarter of the student population do not perceive cultural, religious, or social beliefs as obstacles to seeking

counselling. This group may either have fewer such inhibitions or perceive fewer societal barriers in accessing mental health services.

From a broader perspective, these findings show that cultural and social beliefs influence students' attitudes toward counselling services support at the university. The high percentage of students acknowledging these barriers underscores the need for culturally sensitive counselling approaches and awareness programs to address misconceptions and reduce stigma associated with seeking assistance. The finding in generally indicates that cultural, religious, or social beliefs are perceived by a majority of students as obstacles to seeking counselling services. Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions could enhance the accessibility and acceptance of counselling services support among students, ultimately promoting better university social life and academic outcomes.

The data presented in Table 2 provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of the accessibility of counselling services, focusing on three key aspects: location, operating hours, and appointment procedures. Firstly, a 60.8% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that counselling services are easily accessible. This indicates that more than half of the student population perceives the current arrangements such as the location of the counselling centres, their operating hours, and the ease of securing appointments as convenient and accommodating to their needs. This positive perception indicates that existing services are generally well-positioned and scheduled in a manner that encourages utilization.

Conversely, 24.5% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, reflecting a notable minority who find the counselling services less accessible. This group may face barriers such as inconvenient location, limited or unsuitable operating hours, or complicated appointment procedures. Their perception indicates room for improvement in making counselling services more accessible and user-friendly. Additionally, 13.7% of students remained neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This neutrality might be interpreted in several ways: these students may be indifferent about accessibility, uncertain about the ease of access, or perhaps unaware of the full extent of the services offered. The neutral stance could also point to variability in individual experiences or perceptions that are neither strongly positive nor negative.

In general, the findings implies that while a clear majority of students are satisfied with the accessibility of counselling services, there remains a considerable minority who perceive barriers. Addressing the concerns of the disagreeing group perhaps by extending operating hours, improving location convenience, or streamlining appointment procedures could enhance overall accessibility. These findings interpreted through Rogers' person-centred theory (1940), which emphasizes responding to clients' individual needs and creating a supportive environment for counsellingMoreover, understanding the reasons behind the neutral responses may help in targeting informational or service delivery gaps, thereby ensuring broader and more equitable access for all students. The face to face interview with student A, said that:

> Honestly, I find it a bit challenging to access the counselling services. The office is in a location that that is very near to the other offices, and sometimes I feel it's hard to find a good time to meet because there are no consultation hours in the door of the counsellors or the time table for counselling session. The appointment process can also be a bit confusing, so I thing some students are not comfortable with the location of the counselling room and therefore hesitated to seek help even when they needed it. I think there's room for improvement to make the services more accessible for students.
>
> The student A added that: *As mentioned earlier, one of the rooms is the office for lecturers and is located near other offices, which makes the overall location less appealing for students to attend counselling sessions.* Student C further revealed that: *the room for the female counsellor is well-located; however, there are many offices nearby with a high volume of students passing through. This busy environment cause some students to hesitate or feel uncomfortable when accessing the services.*

These findings imply that the current locations of the counseling rooms may not be ideal for encouraging students to seek support. The room designated for the lecturers is situated in an area with many nearby offices, which may make it less attractive and accessible for students. Similarly, although the female counselor's room is well-placed, the high volume of students passing through the busy environment could cause hesitation or discomfort among students when trying to access counseling services. Overall, these issues highlight the need for more strategic placement of counseling rooms to ensure they are easily accessible and comfortable for students. The findings conccur with the study of Chepwogen et, al (2026) who revealed that the location and physical environment of the guidance and counselling office is an important factors influencing the effectiveness and utilization of counselling services.

The data from Table 2 offers important insights into challenges of how delays in obtaining counselling appointments influence their willingness to use these services. From the table 65.7% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that delays in securing counselling appointments act as a discouraging factor. This high percentage indicates that most students find the waiting times or scheduling delays to be significant barriers that hinder their engagement with counselling services. Such delays could lead to frustration, decreased motivation to seek help, or even complete avoidance of utilizing available support, which can have negative implications for students' overall well-being.

In contrast, 11.8% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, suggesting that a smaller segment of the student population does not perceive appointment delays as a major deterrent. These students might have experienced shorter wait times, more flexible scheduling options, or may not find delays to be a significant obstacle to seeking help. Additionally, 20.6% of students remained neutral regarding the impact of appointment delays. This neutrality could imply that these students are either indifferent about delays, uncertain about their effects, or

perhaps have not experienced significant delays themselves. It might also reflect variability in individual experiences some may have faced delays, while others have not, leading to a neutral overall perception. This finding implies that appointment delays are a prominent barrier for the majority of students, potentially discouraging them from accessing counselling services. Reducing wait times and streamlining appointment procedures could therefore be a key strategies to enhance service utilization. Addressing these delays may not only improve student satisfaction but also encourage more students to seek timely psychological support, contributing to better mental health and academic outcomes on campus

In Table 2 half of the students (50%) either strongly agreed or agreed that the university actively identifies and supports students who require counselling, even without their voluntary help. This implies that a significant portion of the student perceives the university as proactive and attentive in support. Such reveals are indicators that the university's outreach and support mechanisms are effective in reaching students who might not otherwise seek assistance on their own. This proactive approach can be central in early intervention, preventing social welfare issues of the students from worsening.

Conversely, 28.4% of students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, indicating that nearly a third of the students perceive the university as less active or ineffective in identifying students in need of support who do not voluntarily seek help. This perception might point to gaps in the university's outreach programs or a lack of awareness among students about how the university supports their social welfare beyond voluntary help-seeking. However, 18.6% of students remained neutral regarding this statement. This neutrality reflect uncertainty or indifference, possibly due to limited exposure to the university's support initiatives, variability in individual experiences, or differing perceptions of the university's efforts.

Generally, while a majority of students recognize and appreciate the university's proactive identification and support of students in need, a notable proportion perceives deficiencies in these efforts. Identifying students who need counselling support may be hindered by lecturers' heavy workloads and also some psychological problems are not easy to notice. A student may appear fine on the outside, making it difficult for a lecturer to know what they are going through and refer them for counselling. To improve counselling support to students, the university might consider increasing outreach, raising awareness of available support services, and implementing more visible or accessible identification strategies. Enhancing these efforts could foster a stronger perception of support and ensure that more students receive timely help, especially those who do not seek assistance voluntarily.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings strongly indicate that students at MWECAU perceive the university's counselling services as valuable, effective, and integral to their academic, personal, and mental

well-being, with high levels of awareness, trust, and positive attitudes toward confidentiality, support, and the role of counselling in promoting responsible decision-making and personal growth. However, several challenges persist, including limited accessibility due to the location of counselling rooms, scheduling conflicts caused by counsellors' dual roles as lecturers, delays in obtaining appointments, and concerns about confidentiality and stigma, which hinder some students from fully utilizing these services. Additionally, cultural, social, and religious beliefs continue to act as barriers for a segment of students, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive approaches and ongoing awareness campaigns.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the university should improve the strategic placement and accessibility of counselling rooms by selecting more private, quiet, and less busy environments, and by providing clear, visible schedules of counsellors' availability to facilitate timely access. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance awareness and information dissemination about counselling services through continuous orientation sessions, workshops, and targeted communication campaigns, ensuring that all students are well-informed about available support and confidentiality policies. To address barriers such as stigma and cultural beliefs, the university should implement culturally sensitive mental health education programs aimed at reducing misconceptions and promoting positive attitudes towards seeking help. The university should also consider expanding and training the counselling staff to meet increasing demand, while ensuring that counsellors have dedicated time slots separate from teaching duties to minimize scheduling conflicts and delays in appointments. Strengthening confidentiality assurances and actively combating stigma can foster greater trust and willingness among students to utilize these services. Finally, establishing clear procedures for feedback and regular evaluation of counselling facilities and services will help identify ongoing challenges, enabling continuous improvement to create a supportive, accessible, and student-cantered mental health support system.

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