

Integrating Counseling into the Elementary School Curriculum Implications for Building a Strong Educational Foundation

Chinwe Augustina Enwere ✉, Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Nigeria
Adaobi Jennifer Iloakasia, Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Nigeria

✉ chinweenwere@yahoo.com

Abstract: Many elementary school pupils face emotional, social, and behavioral challenges that can negatively affect their academic performance and overall development. Despite this, counseling services are often underutilized or absent in early education, leaving gaps in pupils' social-emotional support. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and was conducted among teachers and professional counsellors in Anambra State. Data were collected electronically using Google Form from 85 respondents categorized by years of experience. A structured questionnaire measured counseling integration, its impact on pupils' socio emotional development, and its educational implications. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA at 0.05 significance level. Eighty-five respondents participated, with most having less than five years of experience (35.3%), followed by 15 to 25 years (30.6%). Findings showed strong agreement that counseling was integrated through structured activities, collaboration, timetable inclusion, and management support, though classroom integration of guidance topics was weaker. Integrated counseling positively influenced pupils' emotional stability, relationships, and participation, though its effect on behavioral reduction was modest. Respondents also agreed that counseling strengthened discipline and overall school performance. ANOVA results revealed significant differences based on years of experience across all three hypotheses, leading to rejection of the null hypotheses. The study concludes that policymakers, educators, and school administrators must prioritize counseling integration to cultivate emotionally resilient, socially competent, and academically motivated pupils, thereby laying a firm foundation for lifelong learning.

Keywords: Counseling integration, elementary education, emotional development, academic foundation, pupil well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the critical issues in elementary education today is how to help pupils to have a comprehensive developmental growth as opposed to academic content only. Numeracy and literacy are important in many schools and there is not much organized time to attend to emotional and social needs of pupils. However, studies always indicate that the social-emotional stage of child development is closely associated with academic outcomes: children who have problems with emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, or

self-control tend to be less engaged and less successful (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2023). This issue is indicative of a larger disparity: most elementary school curricula lack holistic, purposeful elements of counseling that facilitate emotional development in the initial stages of education and that can establish a base upon which learning and life-long wellbeing can be built.

New empirical studies underline the importance of embedding the principles of counseling and social-emotional learning (SEL) in the school environment as one of the mechanisms of enhancing the educational background of pupils. The 2023 position statement of the ASCA declares that school counselors are specially trained to apply interventions to not just social/ emotional growth but also academic achievement, which is more efficient when it is offered as a part of classroom and school culture, but not a pull-out program (ASCA, 2023). A meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. (2022) revealed that SEL programs are associated with better success in interpersonal skills and academic performance and less problematic behavior, which highlights why counseling integration is important. In-depth counseling strategies therefore facilitate not only emotional skills but also academic success which is one of the reasons why I believe counseling should be integrated into the curriculum.

The role of school counselors in classroom settings is one of the important dimensions of this integration. Stamou et al (2024) emphasize that ASCA model encourages counselors to intervene in the classroom, but there is little literature on counselor-led classroom work as a fact, and counselors have very little time as instructional figures (Slaten et al., 2024). However, studies highlight the possibility of introducing counseling into the elementary school curriculum to improve the social-emotional competence of pupils. Counselors will be able to create a more supportive and emotionally responsive learning environment by including lessons about self-regulation, cooperation, and conflict resolution into the routine classroom activities. This is in line with the bigger discourse around human capital formation and behavioral responsibility in Nigerian institutions (Mbuba, 2022a; Mbuba, 2018), where organized direction plays a crucial role in the formation of productive and responsible citizens. Moreover, the idea of promoting the rights and well-being of children by such interventions indicates the necessity of proactive efforts in education (Mbuba, 2022b; Mbuba, 2021).

International studies have also indicated the practice and effectiveness of integrated guidance and counseling in schools. Indicatively, a study conducted in Nepal indicated that guidance and counseling practices had a positive impact on learning strategies, self-management, and social skills among learners that were linked to better behavior and school environment outcomes (Khadka et al., 2025). These results underscore the fact that the value of counseling goes beyond conventional individual therapy and indicates that a combination of guidance can promote a holistic development of pupils in a variety of educational settings. Counseling helps pupils to have better social-emotional abilities, better teacher-pupil contacts, and enhances study practices, all of which lead to better engagement and academic preparedness (Morah et al, 2022; Ngozi and Eke, 2023). These results highlight the role of integrating standardized guidance interventions in schools to make sure that a pupil grows not only academically but also in his interpersonal and self-regulation skills that can be used in the long run to achieve personal and professional development.

The successful inclusion of counseling in the school curriculum does not mean to displace teachers but rather focuses on a shared effort between counselors, teachers, and administrator in order to introduce the concepts of social-emotional learning (SEL) in the everyday instruction. This partnership would make counseling a curricular strand that supplements academic knowledge and contributes to holistic development of pupils. According to the ASCA model, it is necessary to harmonize the processes of counseling with the needs and academic objectives of pupils to increase the engagement levels, teacher-pupil interactions, and the general climate in schools (ASCA, 2023). The educational and organizational integration research also stresses the organized

collaboration in case of reaching systemic results (Okafor et al., 2022; Onwuka et al., 2017; Anyakora et al., 2021; Anyakora et al., 2025; Odimegwu and Ikeotuonye, 2023; Okafor et al., 2022; Ikeotuonye and Efobi, 2022). This kind of integration enhances learning contexts, fosters emotional stability, and makes sure that academic and socio-emotional needs of pupils are handled in a unified manner. Collaborative counseling, thus, is a proactive model of developing well-rounded, engaged, and academically motivated pupils.

Nevertheless, integration impediments still exist, primarily lack of time, lack of training and role ambiguity. The systematic review of classroom intervention of counselors reported a disconnect between recommended practices and school practices stating that many counselors and educators do not have clear models and professional development to deliver counseling content to academic schedules (Slaten et al., 2024). Counseling integration will not reach its full potential without conscious planning and encouragement. Schools should therefore invest in professional learning and structural assets that will empower counselors and teachers to co-plan combined lessons, which are geared toward social-emotional and academic learning.

This study is necessary due to the high research and practice gaps concerning the delivery of counseling services in elementary schools within Nigeria. Despite the generally accepted importance of guidance and counseling programs in the socio-emotional development of pupils, much of the research on this topic in Nigeria has been done in secondary schools or in overall service issues and not how guidance and counseling can be integrated into elementary school curriculum to facilitate learning at the lower grades. In the case of Nigerian public schools, primary guidance and counseling was found to be limited by factors of poor funding, professional staff, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of administrative support, as reported by David and Jacob (2021). Similarly, Esther and Catherine (2025) observed that in Enugu State, the administrators tend to underrate counseling services at primary level and policies are not effectively executed resulting in poor guidance practices.

In the meantime, social-emotional learning (SEL) research conducted internationally, which shares much in common with school counseling goals, demonstrates how SEL programs in elementary schools can enhance academic interests and emotional state of pupils (Kaspar and Massey, 2023; Durlak et al., 2022). However, there is a scarcity of empirical studies on the impacts of counseling integration on learning outcomes and school climate in the state of Anambra. The research is therefore driven by a desire to address this localized research gap that would inform the policymakers and educators about the ways to build upon basic education by integrating structured counseling.

METHODS

The research design applied was a descriptive survey research design to investigate the inclusion of counseling in the elementary school curriculum and the consequences of the same on the development of strong educational foundation. This design was considered suitable as it enabled the researcher to gather information on a specified population and describe their perceptions without having to manipulate any variables. The study was conducted in Anambra State. The target population included teachers and professional counsellors working in elementary schools in the state. These groups were selected because they are directly involved in curriculum implementation, pupil development and counselling services to the school system. Their role as professionals placed them well to offer informed answers to the structure, effects and consequences of the incorporation of counselling into the school curriculum.

Eighty-five respondents took part in the research. The respondents were divided based on the years of experience into four categories; less than five years, five to fifteen years, fifteen to twenty-five years, and above twenty-six years. This categorisation allowed the researcher to conclude whether there was a role of professional experience in

perceptions regarding counselling integration and its results. The participants were chosen by means of random sampling strategy among the available population so that there could be a fair representation. Google Form was used to gather data electronically. The questionnaire link was distributed to teachers and professional counsellors through official channels of communication and professional networks in the state. The electronic approach was used due to convenience, wider coverage, and ease of data aggregation, and due to the fact that it also guaranteed a quicker response rate and reduced data entry errors since the responses were automatically organized in spreadsheet form.

The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher and named Integrating Counseling into the Elementary School Curriculum Questionnaire. The questionnaire had four sections. Section A solicited demographics, especially years of experience. Section B included questions that explored ways in which counselling can be incorporated in the elementary school curriculum. Section C considered the influences of integrated counselling on socio-emotional development of pupils. Section D concentrated on the implications of curriculum integrated counselling towards developing a powerful educational foundation. The items were designed on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

In order to guarantee validity, the instrument was face and content validated by specialists in guidance and counselling and educational management. Their observations prompted slight amendments that made them closer and more consistent with the research objectives. The instrument reliability was determined using a pilot test on a small sample of teachers and counsellors who were not in the main sample. The data obtained were compared with the help of the Cronbachs alpha method, and the reliability coefficient showed an acceptable internal consistency. Google Forms were used to collect the data which was exported into the statue software where it was analyzed. The research questions were addressed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviations. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. In cases where a difference was found to be significant, the Least Significant Difference post-hoc test was used to determine differences between groups. This process offered a concise point of reference within which the findings of the study could be interpreted.

RESULTS

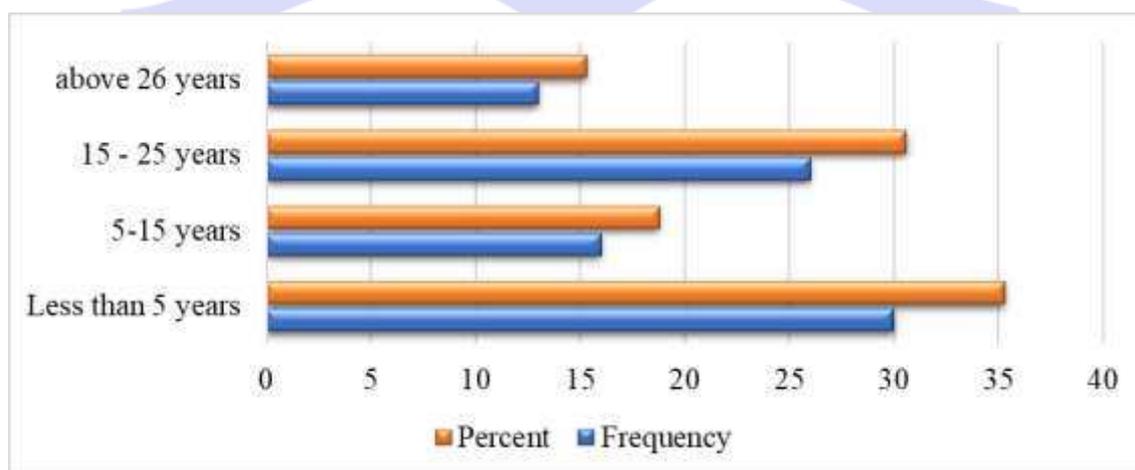


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Years of Professional Experience

The distribution of respondents by years of experience in Figure 1 shows a fairly diverse professional background. The largest group consists of those with less than five years of experience, representing 35.3% (30) of the total respondents, indicating a strong presence of relatively new personnel. Those with 15–25 years of experience follow closely

at 30.6% (26), reflecting a substantial proportion of mid-career professionals. Respondents with 5–15 years of experience account for 18.8% (16), while those with over 26 years of experience constitute 15.3% (13). The data suggest a balanced mix of early-career and experienced individuals in the study.

Research Question 1: How can counseling be integrated into the elementary school curriculum?

Table 1. Mean Responses on Integrating Counseling into the Elementary School Curriculum by Years of Experience

Years of experience		Counseling					
		Counseling activities are clearly included in the school curriculum.	Teachers collaborate with counselors during lesson planning.	Teachers periods are scheduled regularly in the school timetable.	Guidance topics are integrated into classroom teaching.	School management supports the inclusion of counseling in academic programs.	Adequate resources are provided for counseling services.
Less than 5 years	Mean	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.07	4.00	4.00
	Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.000	1.413	.000	.000
5-15 years	Mean	3.37	3.44	3.75	1.00	3.44	3.37
	Std. Deviation	1.025	.964	.577	.000	.892	.957
15 - 25 years	Mean	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.81	4.00	4.00
	Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.000	1.059	.000	.000
above 26 years	Mean	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.38	4.00	4.00
	Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.000	.506	.000	.000
Total	Mean	3.88	3.89	3.95	2.29	3.89	3.88
	Std. Deviation	.498	.464	.263	1.289	.437	.473

Table 1 shows overall agreement that counseling is integrated through curriculum inclusion (3.88), teacher collaboration (3.89), scheduled periods (3.95), management support (3.89), and resources (3.88). However, guidance integration into classroom teaching is lower (2.29). Most experience groups recorded high means (4.00), except those with 5–15 years (3.37–3.75).

Research Question 2: What is the impact of integrated counseling on pupils' socio emotional development?

Table 2. Mean Responses on the Impact of Integrated Counseling on Pupils' Socio-Emotional Development by Years of Experience

Years of experience		Integrated counseling improves pupils' of emotional stability.	Counseling helps pupils manage conflicts effectively.	Pupils demonstrate improved interpersonal relationships.	Counseling enhances pupils' self confidence.	Integrated counseling reduces behavioral problems in school.	Pupils show better classroom participation due to counseling support.
Less than 5 years	Mean	3.53	3.13	3.10	3.07	1.47	3.13
	Std. Deviation	1.042	1.137	.960	.785	.973	.730
5-15 years	Mean	3.06	2.00	2.19	2.06	1.00	2.37
	Std. Deviation	1.063	.966	.981	.929	.000	.885
15 - 25 years	Mean	3.85	3.62	3.81	3.12	1.62	3.58
	Std. Deviation	.368	.804	.402	.653	1.061	.504
above 26 years	Mean	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.38	1.92	4.00
	Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.000	.506	1.256	.000
Total	Mean	3.61	3.20	3.28	2.94	1.49	3.26
	Std. Deviation	.846	1.111	.971	.850	.983	.819

Table 2 shows that respondents generally agree that integrated counseling positively impacts pupils' socio-emotional development. The overall means indicate improvements in emotional stability (3.61), conflict management (3.20), interpersonal relationships (3.28), self-confidence (2.94), and classroom participation (3.26). However, reduction in behavioral problems recorded a lower mean (1.49), suggesting weaker impact in this area. Respondents with above 26 years of experience reported the strongest agreement (4.00) across most variables, followed by those with 15–25 years (3.12–3.85). Those with 5–15 years showed comparatively lower ratings (2.00–3.06), indicating moderate perception of impact.

Research Question 3: What are the implications of curriculum integrated counseling for building a strong educational foundation?

Table 3. Mean Responses on the Implications of Curriculum-Integrated Counseling for Building a Strong Educational Foundation by Years of Experience

Years of experience		Early counseling strengthens pupils' readiness of for learning.	Counseling supports long term academic success.	Integration of counseling promotes positive learning attitudes.	Counseling contributes to discipline and school orderliness.	Curriculum integrated counseling enhances overall school performance.	Counseling at the elementary level prepares pupils for future educational stages.
Less than 5 years	Mean	2.97	3.20	3.33	4.00	3.53	3.13
	Std. Deviation	.850	.407	.479	.000	1.042	1.137
5-15 years	Mean	1.94	2.19	2.25	3.37	3.06	2.00
	Std. Deviation	.854	.911	.931	.957	1.063	.966
15 - 25 years	Mean	3.08	3.23	3.27	4.00	3.85	3.62
	Std. Deviation	.688	.514	.452	.000	.368	.804
above 26 years	Mean	3.38	3.38	3.38	4.00	4.00	4.00
	Std. Deviation	.506	.506	.506	.000	.000	.000
Total	Mean	2.87	3.05	3.12	3.88	3.61	3.20
	Std. Deviation	.884	.706	.714	.473	.846	1.111

Table 3 shows that respondents generally perceive curriculum-integrated counseling as beneficial for building a strong educational foundation. Overall, counseling is seen to contribute to discipline and school orderliness (Mean = 3.88), enhance overall school performance (Mean = 3.61), and promote positive learning attitudes (Mean = 3.12). Early counseling readiness (2.87), support for long-term academic success (3.05), and preparation for future educational stages (3.20) recorded moderate agreement. Respondents with over 26 years of experience reported the highest means across all items (3.38–4.00), while those with 5–15 years of experience recorded the lowest (1.94–3.37), suggesting differences in perception based on professional experience.

Hypothesis 1: Counseling integration into the elementary school curriculum has no significant structure.

Table 4. ANOVA Results on the Structure of Counseling Integration into the Elementary School Curriculum by Years of Experience

Dependent Variable: Integration of Counseling into the Elementary School Curriculum

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	248.868 ^a	3	82.956	18.423	.000
Intercept	35534.127	1	35534.127	7891.449	.000
Years of experience	248.868	3	82.956	18.423	.000
Error	364.732	81	4.503		
Total	41009.000	85			
Corrected Total	613.600	84			

Table 4 shows that years of experience significantly affect perceptions of counseling integration ($F = 18.423$, $p = .000$). The model explains 40.6% of the variance ($R^2 = .406$, Adjusted $R^2 = .384$). These results indicate that counseling integration has a significant and well-defined structure, and thus, Hypothesis 1 which states that it has no significant structure is rejected.

Table 5. Multiple Comparisons of Counseling Integration by Years of Experience (LSD Post Hoc Test)

Dependent Variable: Integration of Counseling into the Elementary School Curriculum

	(I) Years of experience	of (J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Less than 5 years	5-15 years	3.6917*	.65691	.000	2.3846	4.9987
		15 - 25 years	-.7410	.56858	.196	-1.8723	.3903
		above 26 years	-1.3179	.70461	.065	-2.7199	.0840
	5-15 years	Less than 5 years	-3.6917*	.65691	.000	-4.9987	-2.3846
		15 - 25 years	-4.4327*	.67425	.000	-5.7742	-3.0911
		above 26 years	-5.0096*	.79234	.000	-6.5861	-3.4331
	15 - 25 years	Less than 5 years	.7410	.56858	.196	-.3903	1.8723
		5-15 years	4.4327*	.67425	.000	3.0911	5.7742
		above 26 years	-.5769	.72081	.426	-2.0111	.8573
	above 26 years	Less than 5 years	1.3179	.70461	.065	-.0840	2.7199
		5-15 years	5.0096*	.79234	.000	3.4331	6.5861
		15 - 25 years	.5769	.72081	.426	-.8573	2.0111

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 4.503.

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5 presents pairwise comparisons of respondents' perceptions of counseling integration across years of experience. Significant differences were observed between respondents with less than 5 years and 5–15 years (Mean Difference = 3.692, $p = .000$), and between 5–15 years and all other groups (3–5 points, $p = .000$). No significant differences were found between 15–25 years and above 26 years ($p > .05$). The results indicate that respondents with 5–15 years of experience perceive counseling integration significantly differently from less experienced (<5 years) and highly experienced (>15 years) colleagues. Meanwhile, perceptions among mid- to highly experienced staff (15–25 vs. >26 years) are similar. This suggests that professional experience influences perception of counseling integration, with less variation at higher experience levels.

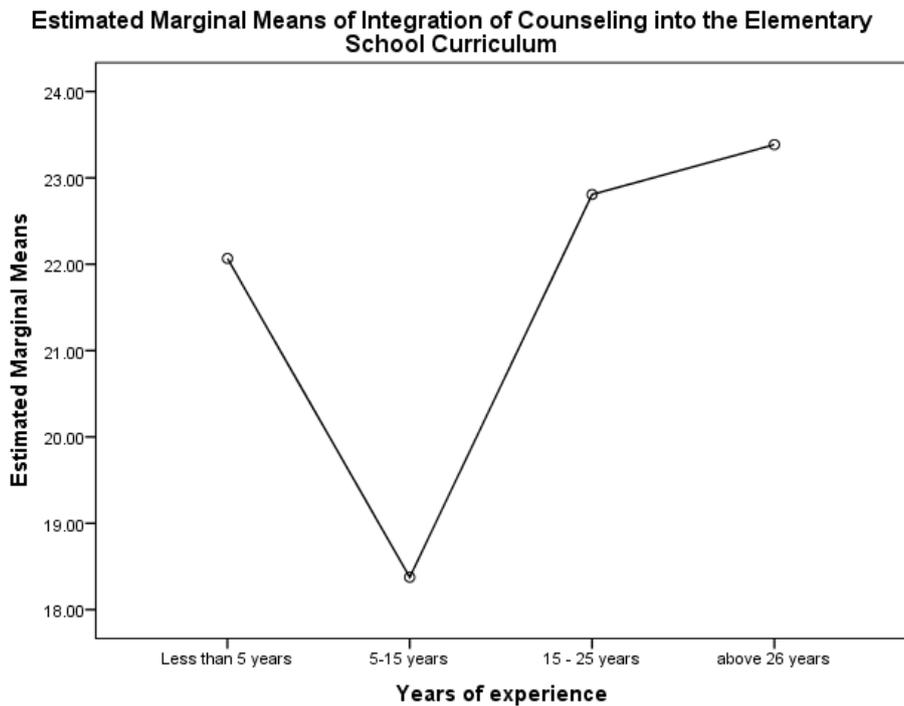


Figure 2. Estimated Marginal Means of Integration of Counseling into the Elementary School Curriculum by Years of Experience

Figure 2 shows that respondents with 5–15 years of experience reported the lowest perception of counseling integration, while those with less than 5 years, 15–25 years, and above 26 years reported higher perceptions. The trend suggests that professional experience influences awareness of integration, with mid-level experience showing a dip, while both early-career and highly experienced staff perceive stronger integration.

Hypothesis 2: Integrated counseling has no significant impact on pupils' socio emotional development.

Table 6. ANOVA Results on the Impact of Integrated Counseling on Pupils' Socio-Emotional Development by Years of Experience

Dependent Variable: Impact on Pupils' Socio Emotional Development

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	664.269 ^a	3	221.423	18.530	.000
Intercept	23870.006	1	23870.006	1997.553	.000
Years of experience	664.269	3	221.423	18.530	.000
Error	967.920	81	11.950		
Total	28528.000	85			
Corrected Total	1632.188	84			

a. R Squared = .407 (Adjusted R Squared = .385)

Table 6 shows that years of experience significantly influence perceptions of the impact of integrated counseling on pupils' socio-emotional development ($F = 18.530$, $p = .000$). The model explains 40.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .407$, Adjusted $R^2 = .385$), indicating a substantial effect. These results suggest that integrated counseling positively contributes to pupils' emotional stability, conflict management, interpersonal relationships, self-confidence, and classroom participation. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is rejected, confirming a significant positive impact.

Table 7. Multiple Comparisons of the Impact of Integrated Counseling on Pupils' Socio-Emotional Development by Years of Experience (LSD Post Hoc Test)

Dependent Variable: Impact on Pupils' Socio Emotional Development

	(I) Years of experience	(J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Less than 5 years	5-15 years	4.7458*	1.07013	.000	2.6166	6.8751
		15 - 25 years	-2.1436*	.92624	.023	-3.9865	-.3007
		above 26 years	-3.8744*	1.14783	.001	-6.1582	-1.5905
	5-15 years	Less than 5 years	-4.7458*	1.07013	.000	-6.8751	-2.6166
		15 - 25 years	-6.8894*	1.09839	.000	-9.0749	-4.7040
		above 26 years	-8.6202*	1.29076	.000	-11.1884	-6.0520
	15 - 25 years	Less than 5 years	2.1436*	.92624	.023	.3007	3.9865
		5-15 years	6.8894*	1.09839	.000	4.7040	9.0749
		above 26 years	-1.7308	1.17422	.144	-4.0671	.6056
	above 26 years	Less than 5 years	3.8744*	1.14783	.001	1.5905	6.1582
		5-15 years	8.6202*	1.29076	.000	6.0520	11.1884
		15 - 25 years	1.7308	1.17422	.144	-.6056	4.0671

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 11.950.

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7 presents pairwise comparisons of respondents' perceptions of the impact of integrated counseling across years of experience. Significant differences were observed between less experienced teachers (<5 years) and all other groups, with mean differences ranging from -3.875 to 4.746 ($p < .05$). Similarly, those with 5–15 years of experience differed significantly from all other groups (mean differences -8.620 to -6.889, $p < .05$). No significant difference was found between the 15–25 years and above 26 years groups ($p > .05$). The results suggest that professional experience strongly influences perceptions of counseling's impact on pupils' socio-emotional development. Less experienced (<5 years) and mid-level (5–15 years) teachers perceive the impact differently from highly experienced staff, while perceptions among more seasoned staff (15–25 vs. >26 years) are similar. This indicates that awareness and valuation of counseling effects increase with experience.

Estimated Marginal Means of Impact on Pupils' Socio Emotional Development

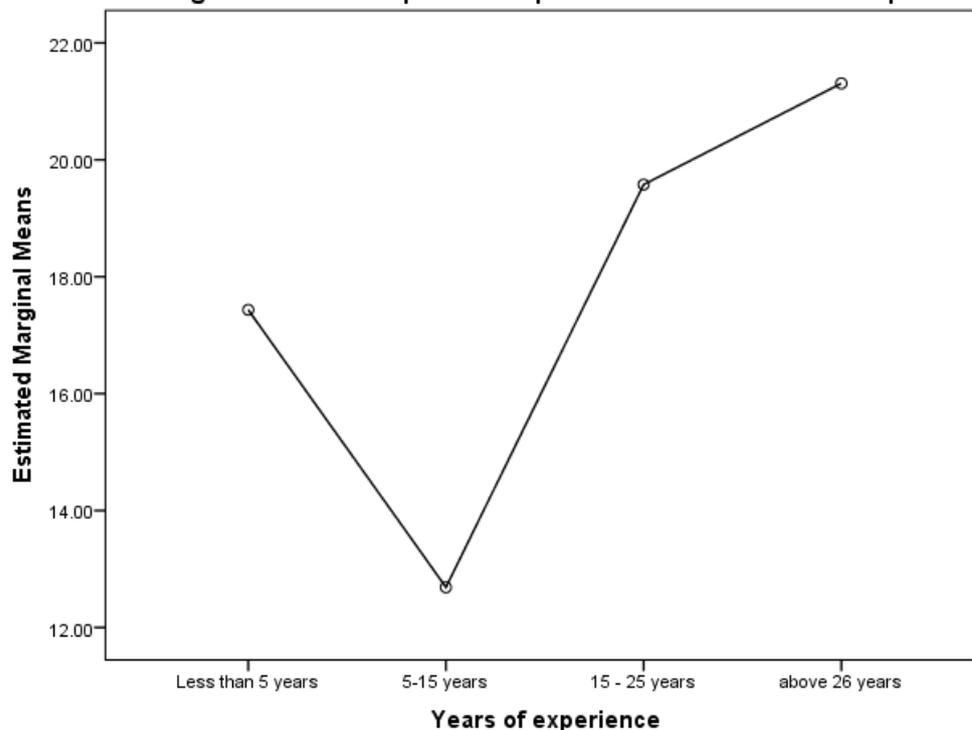


Figure 3. Estimated Marginal Means of the Impact of Integrated Counseling on Pupils' Socio-Emotional Development by Years of Experience

Figure 3 shows that respondents with 5–15 years of experience reported the lowest perceived impact of integrated counseling on pupils' socio-emotional development, while those with less than 5 years, 15–25 years, and above 26 years reported higher perceptions. This pattern suggests that perception of counseling's impact improves with professional experience, with mid-level experience showing a temporary dip, whereas both early-career and highly experienced staff recognize stronger positive effects on pupils' socio-emotional growth.

Hypothesis 3: Curriculum integrated counseling has no significant implication for building a strong educational foundation.

Table 8. ANOVA Results on the Implications of Curriculum-Integrated Counseling for Building a Strong Educational Foundation by Years of Experience

Dependent Variable: Implications for Building a Strong Educational Foundation

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	513.518 ^a	3	171.173	18.213	.000
Intercept	28931.156	1	28931.156	3078.357	.000
Years of experience	513.518	3	171.173	18.213	.000
Error	761.258	81	9.398		
Total	34361.000	85			
Corrected Total	1274.776	84			

a. R Squared = .403 (Adjusted R Squared = .381)

Table 8 shows that years of experience significantly influence perceptions of the implications of curriculum-integrated counseling ($F = 18.213$, $p = .000$). The model explains 40.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .403$, Adjusted $R^2 = .381$), indicating a substantial effect. The findings suggest that integrated counseling positively contributes to pupils' readiness for learning, long-term academic success, positive learning attitudes, discipline, school performance, and preparation for future educational stages. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is rejected, confirming significant implications for building a strong educational foundation.

Table 9. Multiple Comparisons of the Implications of Curriculum-Integrated Counseling for Building a Strong Educational Foundation by Years of Experience (LSD Post Hoc Test)

Dependent Variable: Implications for Building a Strong Educational Foundation

	(I) Years of experience	of (J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	Less than 5 years	5-15 years	5.3542*	.94903	.000	3.4659	7.2424
		15 - 25 years	-.8718	.82143	.292	-2.5062	.7626
		above 26 years	-1.9872	1.01795	.054	-4.0126	.0382
	5-15 years	Less than 5 years	-5.3542*	.94903	.000	-7.2424	-3.4659
		15 - 25 years	-6.2260*	.97410	.000	-8.1641	-4.2878
		above 26 years	-7.3413*	1.14470	.000	-9.6189	-5.0638
	15 - 25 years	Less than 5 years	.8718	.82143	.292	-.7626	2.5062
		5-15 years	6.2260*	.97410	.000	4.2878	8.1641
		above 26 years	-1.1154	1.04135	.287	-3.1873	.9566
above 26 years	Less than 5 years	1.9872	1.01795	.054	-.0382	4.0126	
	5-15 years	7.3413*	1.14470	.000	5.0638	9.6189	
	15 - 25 years	1.1154	1.04135	.287	-.9566	3.1873	

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 9.398.

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 9 presents pairwise comparisons of respondents' perceptions across years of experience. Significant differences were observed between respondents with less than 5 years and 5–15 years (Mean Difference = 5.354, $p = .000$), and between 5–15 years and all other groups (Mean Differences = -6.226 to -7.341, $p = .000$). No significant differences were found between 15–25 years and above 26 years ($p > .05$). The results indicate that respondents with 5–15 years of experience perceive the implications of curriculum-integrated counseling significantly differently from less experienced (<5 years) and highly experienced (>26 years) colleagues. Perceptions among mid- to highly experienced staff (15–25 vs. >26 years) are similar, suggesting that professional experience strongly shapes awareness of counseling's contribution to building a strong educational foundation.

Estimated Marginal Means of Implications for Building a Strong Educational Foundation

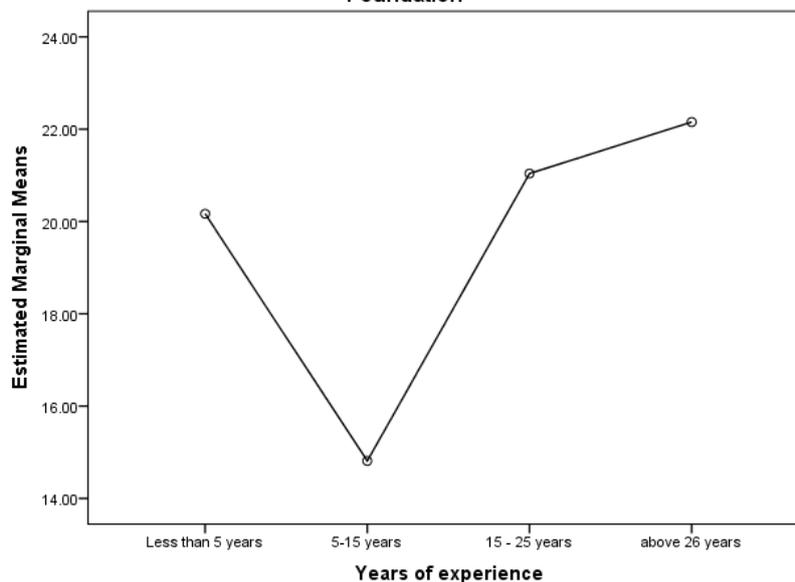


Figure 4. Estimated marginal means of implications for building a strong educational foundation across different years of experience.

Figure 4 shows that educators with less than 5 years and above 15 years of experience report higher implications for building a strong educational foundation. Those with 5–15 years show the lowest mean, suggesting mid-career educators perceive fewer implications, possibly due to adaptation or workload, while early- and late-career educators emphasize foundational impact more.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate a good concordance indicating that counseling is actively integrated into the elementary curriculum as indicated by the high mean scores on curriculum integration, collaborative practices, allocated instructional time, administrative support, and resource allocation. This finding is consistent with Slaten et al. (2024), who state that school counselors are central to classroom and curriculum programs that directly underpin social-emotional growth in conjunction with academic goals, thus highlighting

competent counselor involvement in the integration into school programmes. On the other hand, a study by Widiyanti et al. (2023) argues that, even though guidance services are obligatory in elementary schools, the structuralization is diverse, which means that the actual introduction into classroom practice can be behind the policy intentions in some situations.

In terms of socio-emotional growth of pupils, the research had found general positive outcomes such as emotional stability, conflict management, interpersonal relations and classroom involvement, thus benefiting most of the pupils through integrated counselling. The result is consistent with Raimundo et al. (2024) where the study authors claimed that SEL programmes produced significant improvements in emotional knowledge, social competence, peer relations, and behaviour among elementary school pupils, which suggests that structured programmes also provide socio-emotional benefits. Moreover, the finding that the mean impact of behavioural problems was lower is consistent with multiple studies which established a stronger impact of the SEL interventions on emotional competencies rather than on overt behaviour control (Raimundo et al., 2024). Conversely, Li et al. (2023) revealed that school-wide SEL implementation led to positive changes in emotional competence and behavioural outcomes in cases where leadership and faithfulness of implementation were strong, which indicates that the differences in perceptions might be an indication of the difference in the quality of implementation among experiential groups or schools.

Regarding the implications of the findings to the building of a strong educational base, the results indicated the highest level of consensus on discipline/orderliness and overall school performance especially among highly experienced employees. A similar study in Nigeria highlighted that integrated counselling made great impacts on the socio-emotional status and academic performance of the pupils and thus, affirmed the position that counselling aids comprehensive growth and learning readiness. The observation that teachers in the mid-career stage (5 -15 years) found lower integration and impact could be divergent with some of the literature which suggests that mid-career teachers tend to be more confident in classroom SEL practices (Thierry and Page, 2022), which suggests that contextual or organisational differences may have influenced these perceptions.

CONCLUSION

Counselling is paramount to the incorporation of counselling into the elementary school curriculum as a means of promoting a strong educational base. The major discovery presented in this study is that exposure to counselling services early in life equips pupils with important social-emotional skills, improves self-awareness, and fosters positive views of learning. Well-designed counselling programme helps to overcome behavioural problems, reduce anxiety, and enhance interpersonal relations among young learners, and create a favourable, timely learning atmosphere. Furthermore, counselling intervention at an early age does not just enhance academic achievements, it also prepares the foundation of personal improvement and strength throughout life. In turn, the systematic integration of counselling services within elementary education should be put on the agenda of educational policymakers, school administrators and teachers to promote the comprehensive development of pupils and produce a generation of holistic and emotionally intelligent learners who will be able to succeed both in school and in social life.

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