



**ADVANCING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING SERVICES IN VIETNAMESE
HIGH SCHOOLS: A SYSTEMS-ORIENTED AND EVIDENCE-BASED FRAMEWORK FROM
DONG THAP PROVINCE, VIETNAM**

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Abstract

The growing incidence of psychological and socio-emotional difficulties among adolescents has intensified the need for effective School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) in Vietnamese secondary education. This study investigated the current conditions, challenges, and developmental needs of SPCS in four public high schools in Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province, Vietnam. A mixed-methods design was employed with 712 participants, including students, teachers, and school administrators. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and Pearson correlation, while qualitative interviews explored institutional and professional barriers to counseling implementation.

Findings revealed substantial student demand for counseling related to emotional regulation, academic stress, interpersonal relationships, and career orientation. However, service effectiveness was constrained by stigma, confidentiality concerns, limited professional competence, inadequate facilities, and weak institutional coordination. Counseling activities were largely implemented through concurrently assigned teachers rather than specialized professional systems. The study highlights that counseling effectiveness is shaped by multilevel interactions among professional capacity, organizational governance, school culture, and collaborative support structures. Based on the findings, the study proposes an evidence-based systemic framework to strengthen professionalization, interdisciplinary collaboration, and sustainable school mental health support in Vietnamese high schools.

Keywords: school psychological counseling, adolescent mental health, school-based intervention, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS); Vietnamese high schools

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent mental health has become a major concern in contemporary education systems worldwide. The World Health Organization estimated that mental disorders account for approximately 13% of the global disease burden among adolescents, with anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation being the most common conditions (WHO, 2021). Many psychological disorders also emerge before the age of fourteen but remain insufficiently identified and supported during critical developmental stages (Kessler et al., 2005). Consequently, schools are increasingly recognized as important settings for mental health promotion and early psychosocial intervention.

Recent research demonstrates that effective School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) contribute to students' academic achievement, emotional resilience, social adaptation, and overall well-being (UNESCO, 2022). Contemporary frameworks such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and ecological approaches further emphasize integrated and evidence-based school mental health services (Weist et al., 2018; Hoover & Bostic, 2021).

In Vietnam, psychological difficulties among high school students have intensified due to academic pressure, parental expectations, digital influences, and rapid sociocultural change. Previous studies reported increasing levels of stress, anxiety, emotional instability, and school burnout among adolescents (Nguyen Cong Khanh et al., 2019). Although school counseling services were formally institutionalized through Circular No. 31/2017/TT-BGDĐT, implementation remains constrained by shortages of professionally trained counselors, fragmented intervention models, and weak interdisciplinary collaboration (Dang Hoang Minh, 2021). Existing evidence also indicates substantial student demand for counseling support related to emotional regulation, academic stress, interpersonal relationships, and career orientation (Nguyen Thi My Loc, 2018; Tran Thanh Nam, 2020).



In Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province, rapid urbanization and digital transformation have generated increasingly complex psychosocial challenges for adolescents, while empirical evidence regarding counseling effectiveness remains limited. Current services continue to rely largely on part-time counseling arrangements and insufficiently integrated support systems.

Against this background, this study examines the current status of school psychological counseling services in high schools in Cao Lanh Ward, identifies major implementation barriers, and proposes evidence-based solutions for improving counseling effectiveness. Grounded in systems theory and ecological perspectives, the study contributes to the development of sustainable and professionally oriented school mental health services in Vietnam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

School Psychological Counseling (SPC) has become an essential component of contemporary education systems in response to increasing adolescent mental health concerns and the growing emphasis on holistic student development. Internationally, SPC has evolved from traditional vocational guidance models toward integrated, evidence-based, and developmental approaches addressing students' academic, emotional, behavioral, and social needs. Foundational theories include Frank Parsons' vocational guidance theory (1909) and Carl Rogers' person-centered theory (1951), which emphasized empathy and supportive counseling relationships.

Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes SPC as a comprehensive psychological–educational support system emphasizing prevention, early intervention, resilience, and mental health promotion. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that effective counseling services improve academic achievement, emotional regulation, school connectedness, and psychosocial adjustment among adolescents (Baskin et al., 2010; Carey & Dimmitt, 2012; Kearney et al., 2021). Recent frameworks such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and ecological approaches further highlight the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based intervention (Hilts, Liu, & Guo, 2023; Liu, Qu, & Hilts, 2025).

In Vietnam, SPC has received increasing academic and policy attention amid educational reform and rising adolescent psychological difficulties. Previous studies indicate that high school students frequently experience stress related to academic pressure, parental expectations, interpersonal conflict, and career uncertainty (Nguyen Quang Uan & Dinh Van Vang, 2008; Tran Thi Tuyet Mai, 2011; Hoang Anh, 2017; Le Minh Cong et al., 2021). However, counseling implementation remains constrained by shortages of trained personnel, inadequate facilities, and fragmented support systems.

Grounded in systems theory and ecological perspectives, this study conceptualizes SPC as an integrated educational support ecosystem in which counseling effectiveness is shaped by the interaction among counselor competencies, school leadership, institutional resources, family involvement, and community collaboration.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design in which qualitative inquiry served as the primary approach and quantitative analysis functioned as a complementary component. The design enabled an in-depth exploration of perceptions, experiences, barriers, and operational issues related to school psychological counseling services (SPCS), while quantitative data enhanced the reliability and objectivity of the findings.

The study adopted a multi-informant and triangulation approach by collecting data from students, counseling-assigned teachers, and school administrators, thereby strengthening contextual validity and empirical credibility.

3.2. Research Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in four public high schools in Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province, Vietnam. Participants were selected using controlled convenience sampling combined with stakeholder stratification to ensure contextual representation.

The final sample included 712 participants: students ($n = 691$), counseling-assigned teachers ($n = 12$), and school administrators ($n = 9$). The multi-level sampling structure supported cross-group comparison and data triangulation across institutional contexts.

3.3. Research Instruments

The study was grounded in systems theory, ecological systems theory, and the help-seeking behavior framework. Data were collected through structured questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

The instrument consisted of 75 observed variables distributed across stakeholder groups: students (25 items), counseling-assigned teachers (30 items), and school administrators (20 items). The scales examined counseling communication, support needs, barriers, implementation challenges, organizational conditions, and development strategies for SPCS.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The study followed seven stages: theoretical framework development, instrument design, expert consultation, pilot testing, official data collection, data coding and cleaning, and statistical analysis.

Student surveys were administered anonymously in classroom settings to reduce social desirability bias. Questionnaires for teachers and administrators were distributed through both face-to-face and online formats. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into the implementation and challenges of school psychological counseling services (SPCS).

The integration of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews enhanced the comprehensiveness and contextual richness of the data.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were coded in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS 26.0. Analytical procedures included descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis ($\alpha \geq .70$), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), KMO and Bartlett's tests, Eigenvalue and cumulative variance criteria, and Pearson correlation analysis.

Mean scores were interpreted using a five-level evaluative framework ranging from "very low" to "very high."

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Contextual Overview of the High School System in Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province

The high school system in Cao Lanh Ward comprises five schools serving approximately 5,391 students, supported by 313 teachers and 17 administrators. Student-teacher ratios varied substantially across institutions, ranging from 11-12 students per teacher in the specialized high school to approximately 18-20 students per teacher in mainstream public schools.

Despite increasing student enrollment and growing psychological support needs, specialized personnel for School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) remained notably limited. Counseling activities were primarily implemented by teachers undertaking concurrent responsibilities rather than professionally trained counselors. Unequal student-teacher ratios further reflected disparities in institutional capacity for individualized psychological support and student monitoring.

From a systems perspective, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of SPCS is constrained not only by professional competency limitations but also by structural inequalities in human-resource allocation, organizational capacity, and institutional support mechanisms. The results underscore the necessity of professional specialization, systematic counseling infrastructure, and sustainable policy investment to strengthen school-based mental health services.

4.2. Current Status of School Psychological Counseling Services in High Schools

4.2.1. Characteristics of the Research Sample

The study surveyed 691 students from four high schools using a controlled convenience sampling strategy. Female students accounted for 58% of the sample, while male students represented 42%. Grade 11 students comprised the largest proportion (43%), followed by Grade 10 (31%) and Grade 12 students (26%).

Most participants were drawn from Tran Quoc Toan High School (73.0%), followed by Cao Lanh High School (21.6%), Do Cong Tuong High School (4.5%), and Thien Ho Duong High School (0.6%). Although the unequal distribution across schools may indicate potential cluster bias, the relatively large sample size and inclusion of multiple institutional contexts enhanced the empirical robustness and contextual relevance of the study.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Research Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency / Percentage	Interpretation
Gender	Female	58%	Female students represented the majority of participants.
	Male	42%	Male students accounted for less than half of the sample.
Grade Level	Grade 10	31%	Moderate representation of lower secondary high school students.
	Grade 11	43%	Largest proportion of participants in the sample.
	Grade 12	26%	Lowest representation among grade levels.





School Distribution	Tran Quoc Toan High School	73.0%	Majority of participants originated from this school, indicating possible cluster concentration.
	Cao Lanh High School	21.6%	Second largest institutional representation.
	Do Cong Tuong High School	4.5%	Limited representation.
	Thien Ho Duong High School	0.6%	Minimal participation within the sample.
Sampling Characteristics	Controlled convenience sampling	N = 691	Sample reflects field accessibility and contextual representation rather than broad statistical generalization.
Overall Interpretation	—	—	The relatively large sample size and inclusion of multiple schools enhanced the internal consistency and contextual relevance of the study findings.
Variable	Category	Frequency Percentage /	Interpretation

4.2.2. Students' Perceptions of Communication, Importance, Needs, Barriers, and Counseling Room Models

4.2.2.1. Perceptions of Communication in School Psychological Counseling Services

Students reported positive perceptions of communication activities related to School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) (Mean = 3.69–4.00; $\alpha = .9137$). The highest-rated item indicated that effective communication enhanced students' willingness to seek psychological support (TT5; Mean = 4.00). Participants also acknowledged the supportive role of teachers and school administrators in promoting students' psychological well-being. These findings suggest that communication functions not only as an informational channel but also as a psychosocial mechanism that reduces stigma and normalizes help-seeking behaviors. However, communication practices remain relatively fragmented, indicating the need for more systematic and integrated school mental health communication strategies.

4.2.2.2. Perceptions of the Importance of School Psychological Counseling Services

Students demonstrated highly positive perceptions regarding the importance of SPCS (Mean = 3.83–3.99; $\alpha = .9472$). Counseling was most strongly perceived as supporting personal development and future orientation (NT4; Mean = 3.99). Students also recognized the preventive and supportive roles of counseling in fostering emotional well-being and safe school environments. The findings indicate that students view SPCS as a multidimensional developmental support system rather than merely a crisis-intervention service, reflecting increasing awareness of the educational and psychological value of school counseling.

4.2.2.3. Perceived Needs for School Psychological Counseling Services

Students expressed substantial needs for counseling support (Mean = 3.65–3.82; $\alpha = .936$), particularly in areas related to career orientation, emotional regulation, stress management, and mental health support. Concerns regarding anxiety, motivation, and identity development were also frequently reported.

These results suggest that students' counseling needs extend beyond academic issues and increasingly involve psychosocial adaptation and developmental challenges characteristic of adolescence.

4.2.2.4. Perceived Barriers to Accessing School Psychological Counseling Services

Perceived barriers to counseling access were reported at a moderate level (Mean = 3.25–3.46; $\alpha = .901$). Confidentiality concerns represented the most significant barrier (RC3; Mean = 3.46), followed by fear of stigma and difficulties in accessing counseling schedules.

The findings indicate that psychosocial barriers outweigh structural constraints, suggesting that students' willingness to access counseling is strongly influenced by perceptions of privacy, trust, and emotional safety. Strengthening confidentiality and anti-stigma practices therefore remains essential for improving counseling accessibility.

4.2.2.5. Proposed Model for School Psychological Counseling Rooms

Students strongly supported the development of professionalized counseling room models (Mean = 3.80–3.93; $\alpha = .9432$). Counselor competence and empathic capacity were identified as the highest priorities (PhongTVTL4; Mean = 3.93), followed by confidential counseling spaces and flexible support modalities.

These findings suggest that students expect counseling services to operate according to professional, student-centered, and psychologically safe principles. From an ecological perspective, counseling rooms should function not only as physical spaces but also as integrated support environments that foster trust, accessibility, and emotional security within the school system.

Table 2. Summary of Students' Perceptions, Needs, Barriers, and Expectations Regarding School Psychological Counseling Services

Dimension	Mean Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Key Highest-Rated Item	Main Findings	Implications
Perceptions of Communication in SPCS	3.69–4.00	.9137	TT5 (Mean = 4.00)	Students believed communication activities could increase help-seeking behavior and engagement with counseling services. Communication was perceived as both informational and psychosocial support.	Schools should develop integrated multi-channel communication strategies to reduce stigma, normalize counseling, and strengthen mental health awareness.
Perceptions of the Importance of SPCS	3.83–3.99	.9472	NT4 (Mean = 3.99)	Students recognized counseling as important for personal development, early intervention, and emotional/academic support. Counseling was viewed beyond crisis response toward developmental functions.	Counseling services should be integrated into comprehensive educational and developmental support systems.
Perceived Needs for SPCS	3.65–3.82	.936	NC4 (Mean = 3.82)	Students expressed strong needs for career guidance, emotional regulation, mental health support, and identity development.	Counseling programs should adopt preventive-developmental and student-centered approaches addressing multidimensional adolescent needs.
Perceived Barriers to Accessing SPCS	3.25–3.46	.901	RC3 (Mean = 3.46)	Major barriers included confidentiality concerns, stigma, fear of judgment, and scheduling difficulties. Psychosocial barriers were stronger than logistical constraints.	Schools need to improve privacy protection, psychological safety, trust, and anti-stigma practices to enhance accessibility.
Proposed Model for School Counseling Rooms	3.80–3.93	.9432	PhongTV TL4 (Mean = 3.93)	Students prioritized counselor competence, empathic interaction, confidential spaces, and flexible counseling modalities.	SPCS should be professionalized through standardized procedures, specialized personnel, confidential environments, and diversified support methods.
Dimension	Mean Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Key Highest-Rated Item	Main Findings	Implications





4.2.3. Teachers' Perceptions of the Current Status, Needs, and Challenges of School Psychological Counseling

4.2.3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The sample included nine teachers involved in school psychological counseling on a part-time basis across four high schools in Cao Lanh Ward. The counseling system remained entirely non-specialized, relying mainly on homeroom and subject teachers. Female participants accounted for 55.6%, while most were aged 41–50 years (66.7%) and had more than 10 years of teaching experience (94.5%). Although 33.3% held postgraduate degrees, only 33.3% had received formal training in school counseling, indicating a substantial gap between academic qualifications and specialized counseling competence. Overall, the staffing structure reflected a highly experienced but insufficiently professionalized counseling workforce.

Table 3. Characteristics of Part-Time School Counseling Staff Across High Schools

Indicator	Cao Lanh High school	Tran Quoc Toan High School	Do Cong Tuong High School	Thien Ho Duong High School	Overall
Counseling staff (n)	3	2	2	2	9
Organizational model	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Entirely part-time
Specialized counselors	None	None	None	None	Not established
Main personnel	Subject teachers/Homeroom teachers	Subject teachers/Homeroom teachers	Subject teachers/Homeroom teachers	Subject teachers/Homeroom teachers	100% part-time
Postgraduate degree	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	33.3%
Specialized counseling training	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Generally low
Teaching experience >10 years	94.5%	94.5%	94.5%	94.5%	Very high

4.2.3.2. Perceptions of the Current Status of School Counseling

Teachers reported very high agreement regarding the current needs of school counseling services ($M = 4.00$ – 4.06 ; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.9568$). The highest-rated items emphasized the need for specialized professional training and adequate counseling facilities (TT2, TT4; $M = 4.06$). Participants highlighted the necessity of systematic training in counseling skills, therapeutic communication, and crisis intervention, alongside dedicated counseling spaces and professional resources. Heavy teaching workloads were also identified as a major barrier to effective counseling implementation (TT3; $M = 4.00$). Overall, findings suggest that current counseling practices remain largely dependent on underprepared part-time teachers and insufficient institutional infrastructure.

4.2.3.3. Perceived Importance of School Counseling

Teachers demonstrated highly positive perceptions regarding the importance of school psychological counseling ($M = 4.11$ – 4.28 ; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.9486$). Early identification and intervention for students' psychological problems received the highest agreement (NT2; $M = 4.28$), followed by the role of counseling in maintaining students' mental health and emotional stability (NT1; $M = 4.22$). Teachers also acknowledged counseling as an essential component of holistic education and emphasized the need for basic counseling competencies among all teachers. These findings indicate strong recognition of counseling as a preventive and developmental educational function.

4.2.3.4. Perceived Student Needs for School Counseling

Teachers perceived students' counseling needs as high and multidimensional ($M = 3.83$ – 4.06 ; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.9118$). The highest-rated need concerned psychological pressure related to academic performance, career

orientation, and family expectations (NCTV1; $M = 4.06$). Emotional regulation difficulties, stress management, and interpersonal conflicts were also frequently identified (NCTV2; $M = 4.00$). Teachers further believed that strengthened counseling services could reduce negative student behaviors such as violence, isolation, and disciplinary violations (NCTV5; $M = 4.00$). Overall, counseling needs were perceived as both preventive and developmental rather than merely crisis-oriented.

4.2.3.5. Perceived Challenges in School Counseling Implementation

Perceived implementation challenges ranged from moderate to high ($M = 3.44$ – 3.78 ; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.8875$). The two most significant barriers were excessive workload (KK1; $M = 3.78$) and insufficient specialized counseling knowledge and skills (KK2; $M = 3.78$). Inadequate counseling facilities and professional resources also represented a notable challenge (KK5; $M = 3.72$). Although institutional support received the lowest score (KK3; $M = 3.44$), teachers still indicated that counseling had not yet been prioritized within school management structures. Overall, barriers were predominantly systemic rather than individual.

4.2.3.6. Perceived Reasons Students Avoid Counseling Services

Teachers identified several major barriers preventing students from accessing counseling services ($M = 3.61$ – 3.89 ; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.9182$). Lack of understanding regarding counseling functions and benefits (NN2; $M = 3.89$) and concerns about confidentiality (NN3; $M = 3.89$) were the most prominent factors. Fear of stigma and being labeled as “having psychological problems” also emerged as a major concern (NN1; $M = 3.83$). These findings suggest that psychological stigma, limited mental health literacy, and weak trust in confidentiality significantly reduce students' help-seeking behaviors.

4.2.3.7. Recommendations for Developing a Professional Counseling Room

Teachers strongly supported the establishment of a professional school counseling system ($M = 4.06$ – 4.17 ; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.9534$). The highest-rated recommendation emphasized periodic specialized training for counseling teachers (XD4; $M = 4.17$). Participants also highlighted the importance of private and student-friendly counseling spaces (XD2; $M = 4.11$) and interdisciplinary collaboration among counselors, homeroom teachers, parents, and external specialists (XD5; $M = 4.11$). Overall, respondents viewed school counseling as an integrated support ecosystem requiring professional staff, appropriate infrastructure, and coordinated institutional support.

Table 4. Summary of Teachers' Perceptions of School Psychological Counseling Services (N = 9)

Dimension	Key Findings	Mean Range	Interpretation
Current status of counseling services	Teachers emphasized the need for clear policies, specialized training, reduced workload, and adequate counseling facilities.	4.00–4.06	Counseling services are considered essential but remain insufficiently professionalized and under-resourced.
Perceived importance of counseling	Counseling was viewed as critical for mental health support, early intervention, and holistic student development.	4.11–4.28	Strong consensus that school counseling is a core preventive and developmental educational function.
Perceived student counseling needs	Students were perceived to experience high academic pressure, emotional difficulties, and career-related stress.	3.83–4.06	Counseling needs are broad, preventive, and developmental rather than crisis-focused only.
Implementation challenges	Major barriers included excessive workload, limited counseling expertise, and inadequate facilities.	3.44–3.78	Challenges were predominantly systemic and organizational.
Reasons students avoid counseling	Main barriers were stigma, poor understanding of counseling services, and concerns about confidentiality.	3.61–3.89	Psychological stigma and lack of trust significantly reduce help-seeking behavior.
Recommendations for professional counseling rooms	Teachers strongly supported specialized training, private counseling spaces, and interdisciplinary collaboration.	4.06–4.17	Participants advocated for a professionalized, integrated, and student-centered counseling system.

4.2.4. School Administrators' Evaluation of the Current Status and Improvement Strategies for School Psychological Counseling Services in High Schools

The findings indicate that school administrators highly recognized the importance of School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) in high schools. However, implementation remains constrained by inadequate

facilities, limited professional expertise, weak coordination mechanisms, and persistent mental health stigma among students and parents.

Administrators emphasized the need for professionalization and systemic reform, particularly through recruiting specialized counselors, strengthening continuous professional training, improving counseling infrastructure, promoting mental health awareness, and enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration. Overall, the findings suggest that effective SPCS development requires an integrated management approach combining leadership support, professional capacity building, infrastructure investment, and multi-sector cooperation.

Table 5. Summary of School Administrators' Perceptions of School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS)

Domain	Key Findings	Empirical Evidence
Sample Characteristics	The study involved 9 school administrators from three high schools in Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province, reflecting relatively balanced gender representation and managerial diversity.	56% male; 44% female; 33% principals; 67% vice principals; THPT Cao Lanh (45%), THPT Tran Quoc Toan (33%), THPT Do Cong Tuong (22%).
Current Status of SPCS	SPCS has been institutionally established with defined plans and assigned personnel; however, implementation remains partly formalistic and insufficiently responsive to students' actual psychological needs. Student utilization of counseling services remains limited.	Mean scores ranged from 3.22–4.33; highest: institutional planning and assignment ($M = 4.33$); lowest: students' willingness to seek counseling support ($M = 3.22$); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.8434.
Major Challenges in SPCS	The most significant barriers included inadequate counseling facilities, limited professional expertise among counseling staff, weak coordination mechanisms, and stigma toward psychological counseling among students and parents.	Mean scores ranged from 4.00–4.44; highest difficulty: inadequate facilities and counseling conditions ($M = 4.44$); stigma and low awareness among students/parents ($M = 4.33$); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.6989.
Proposed Improvement Strategies	Administrators strongly supported professionalization strategies, including employing specialized counseling personnel, strengthening mental health promotion, improving school climate, and enhancing intersectoral collaboration.	Mean scores ranged from 4.78–4.89; highest-rated solutions: specialized personnel, mental health-friendly environment, and communication enhancement ($M = 4.89$); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.9433.
Perceptions of Effective SPCS Development	Sustainable SPCS effectiveness depends on leadership commitment, professional training, infrastructure investment, and coordinated support networks involving schools, families, and mental health experts.	Mean scores ranged from 4.44–4.67; highest-rated factors: principal leadership, continuous professional training, and multidisciplinary collaboration ($M = 4.67$); Cronbach's Alpha = 0.966.
Overall Interpretation	SPCS has reached an initial institutional level but still faces structural limitations regarding professionalization, infrastructure, and student accessibility. Sustainable improvement requires a systemic and integrated management approach.	High agreement across all domains confirmed the growing recognition of SPCS as an essential component of preventive and holistic education.





4.2.5. Qualitative Findings on Strategies to Improve the Effectiveness of School Psychological Counseling Services

The qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews with 07 participants, including school administrators and counseling-assigned teachers, revealed a strong consensus on the urgent need to strengthen School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) in high schools.

Participants emphasized five key priorities: (1) transitioning from part-time counseling models toward professionalized services with specialized personnel; (2) enhancing continuous, practice-oriented professional training; (3) strengthening leadership and organizational governance through clear planning and resource allocation; (4) developing psychologically safe school environments and effective mental health communication to reduce help-seeking stigma; and (5) promoting collaboration among schools, families, mental health professionals, and community organizations to establish sustainable student support systems.

Table 6. Summary of Qualitative Findings on Improving School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS)

Theme	Key Findings	Empirical Evidence
Qualitative Sample Characteristics	The qualitative study involved administrators and teachers from four high schools using purposive sampling to ensure role diversity and practical relevance.	Total participants: 7; administrators: 3; counseling teachers: 4; schools involved: THPT Cao Lãnh, THPT Đỗ Công Tường, THPT Thiên Hộ Dương, and THPT Trần Quốc Toàn.
Professionalization of Counseling Services	Participants strongly supported transitioning from a part-time counseling model to a professionalized system involving psychological specialists.	High consensus among both administrators and teachers regarding the need for specialized counseling personnel and integrated service models.
Professional Capacity Development	Counseling competency and intervention skills were considered decisive factors affecting SPCS effectiveness.	Participants emphasized continuous, practice-oriented, and needs-based professional training programs for counseling staff.
School Leadership and Governance	School leadership was identified as a key factor in organizing, sustaining, and improving counseling services.	Effective implementation requires clear management mechanisms, task allocation, and sufficient institutional resources.
Psychologically Supportive School Environment	A friendly and psychologically safe school climate combined with mental health communication was considered essential for increasing student accessibility to counseling services.	Participants highlighted the importance of reducing stigma and encouraging students to seek psychological support proactively.
Integrated Support Ecosystem	Strengthening collaboration among schools, families, psychologists, and social organizations was viewed as necessary for sustainable student support.	Participants advocated multidisciplinary and intersectoral cooperation to establish a comprehensive psychological support network.
Overall Interpretation	The findings reflected a shared perception that improving SPCS requires a systemic, integrated, and professionalized approach rather than fragmented interventions.	Strong consensus across participant groups confirmed the feasibility and urgency of comprehensive reform in school psychological counseling services.

Overall, the findings indicate that school psychological counseling in high schools in Cao Lãnh ward remains constrained by structural, professional, and psychosocial barriers despite the growing recognition of its educational significance. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence highlights the urgent need for a transition from a fragmented, duty-based model toward a professionalized, integrated, and sustainable counseling system.

Accordingly, strengthening specialized human resources, institutional governance, psychological safety within schools, and multi-stakeholder collaboration emerges as a strategic foundation for improving the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of school psychological counseling in contemporary education.



5. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING SERVICES IN HIGH SCHOOLS IN CAO LÃNH WARD, ĐỒNG THÁP PROVINCE

The findings indicate that School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS) in high schools in Cao Lanh Ward remain constrained by limited professional specialization, inadequate facilities, fragmented coordination, low help-seeking behaviors, and insufficient evidence-based management. Grounded in systems theory, ecological perspectives, and contemporary school mental health frameworks, this study proposes six interrelated solutions to strengthen the effectiveness, sustainability, and professionalization of SPCS.

Solution 1. Professionalization of the Counseling Workforce

Current counseling activities are primarily implemented through part-time and role-based models, limiting intervention quality and service continuity. The study therefore proposes a gradual transition toward specialized counseling personnel supported by competency-based professional standards in psychological assessment, intervention, crisis response, and ethical practice. Schools should simultaneously strengthen partnerships with external mental health professionals and counseling centers to enhance referral and interdisciplinary support mechanisms.

Solution 2. Development of Advanced Counseling Competencies for Teachers

Although teachers play a central role in student support, counseling practices remain largely experience-based rather than professionally grounded. A continuous professional development (CPD) model is therefore recommended, focusing on counseling communication, emotional support, crisis intervention, behavioral risk identification, and reflective supervision. The integration of training workshops, online learning, and professional learning communities (PLCs) would support sustainable competency development and improve counseling quality.

Solution 3. Standardization of Counseling Facilities and Therapeutic Spaces

Inadequate counseling facilities were identified as a major barrier to service accessibility and confidentiality. The study proposes the establishment of dedicated counseling rooms designed according to therapeutic principles, ensuring privacy, emotional safety, accessibility, and professional functionality. Standardized operational procedures for screening, intervention, referral, follow-up, and data confidentiality should also be institutionalized to improve service consistency and student trust.

Solution 4. Building a Mental Health–Supportive School Culture

Psychological stigma and fear of social judgment remain significant barriers to help-seeking behaviors among students. Accordingly, schools should develop a mental health–supportive culture through systematic communication campaigns and the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) into curricular and extracurricular activities. Promoting mental health literacy, emotional resilience, and help-seeking normalization is essential for creating psychologically safe and inclusive educational environments.

Solution 5. Establishment of a Multi-Tiered Collaborative Support Network

Current counseling practices remain fragmented and insufficiently coordinated across stakeholders. Based on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, the study recommends establishing an integrated support network linking schools, families, healthcare providers, mental health professionals, and community organizations. Formal referral systems, multidisciplinary collaboration, and coordinated case-management mechanisms are necessary to ensure continuity and comprehensiveness of psychological support.

Solution 6. Strengthening Data-Driven Governance and Evaluation

The findings suggest that counseling services have not yet been fully institutionalized within school governance systems. The study therefore proposes a data-driven management framework integrating counseling activities into school development strategies and monitoring processes. Schools should adopt standardized evaluation indicators related to accessibility, intervention effectiveness, student satisfaction, and psychological outcomes, combined with continuous improvement cycles based on the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) model. Such an approach would strengthen accountability, service quality, and long-term sustainability of SPCS.

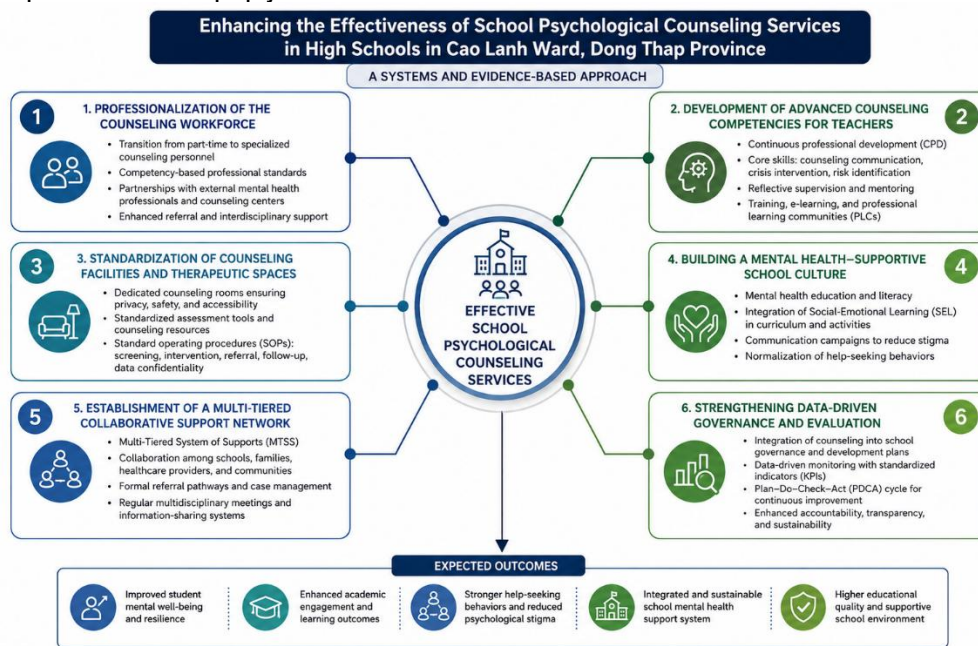


Figure 1. A Systems and Evidence-Based Framework for Enhancing School Psychological Counseling Services in High Schools in Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province

Collectively, the six proposed solutions demonstrate that improving school psychological counseling effectiveness requires a systemic and integrated approach rather than isolated interventions. The proposed framework emphasizes the interdependence between professional workforce development, organizational governance, therapeutic environments, cultural transformation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Such a multidimensional model is expected to support the development of sustainable, professional, and evidence-based school psychological counseling systems aligned with the demands of contemporary education and student mental health development.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an evidence-based analysis of the current status and systemic challenges of school psychological counseling services in high schools in Cao Lanh Ward, Dong Thap Province. The findings indicate that counseling effectiveness is constrained by shortages of specialized personnel, limited professional competencies, inadequate infrastructure, weak coordination mechanisms, and socio-cultural barriers to help-seeking behavior.

Grounded in systems theory and ecological school mental health frameworks, the study proposes a six-component intervention model emphasizing professionalization, competency development, standardized counseling systems, supportive school culture, interdisciplinary collaboration, and data-driven governance. These findings support a shift from fragmented and reactive practices toward sustainable, preventive-developmental, and system-oriented school counseling models.

The study contributes both theoretically and practically by providing an empirical foundation for policy development, professional training, and the long-term institutionalization of school psychological counseling services in Vietnamese secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of School Psychological Counseling Services (SPCS), several recommendations are proposed.

First, schools should institutionalize counseling services as an essential component of school development through professional role clarification and standardized operational procedures. Second, universities should strengthen competency-based and practice-oriented training for future counseling professionals. Third, teachers and counseling staff should continuously improve competencies in counseling, crisis intervention, and student mental health support through professional development and supervision.

In addition, schools should promote mental health literacy and normalize help-seeking behaviors to reduce stigma surrounding counseling services. Finally, future research should prioritize intervention-based and

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