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Management of Psychological Counseling for High School Students

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Abstract. Psychological counseling for students is an important activity in high schools today. The article presents the results of a recent study that assessed the current situation of the implementation and management of psychological counseling for students in some high schools in Ho Chi Minh City and Hau Giang Province, Vietnam. The content of the survey on the current situation is based on the theoretical basis of the elements of psychological counselling activities for students (objectives, content, methods, supportive conditions for activities) and the implementation of the management function of high school principals towards that activity. Comments and assessments on the situation are based on a survey with 1,127 respondents who are managers, high school teachers, and parents. The assessment of the current situation includes objectives, content, methods, conditions supporting psychological counseling activities and the implementation of management functions of the principal in psychological counseling activities for students in high schools. A mixed approach is applied, based on the analysis of survey data obtained to make quantitative assessments and combined with research on secondary data such as evaluation reports from educational management levels, local scientific research to make qualitative assessments. The results were organized according to the strengths and weaknesses identified in managing psychological counseling activities for students in high schools. Based on these strengths and weaknesses, the article proposes some measures to manage psychological counseling for high school students in Vietnam in the post-COVID-19 social context, when the issue of psychological counseling for students is being urgently raised.

Keywords: counseling; management; psychology; high school; Vietnam

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe and persistent psychological trauma with serious psychological consequences for many people, including high school students (Ministry of Health Vietnam, 2021). This shows the urgency of carrying out reforms in psychological counseling activities for students in schools. Since March 2020, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has collaborated with

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the World Health Organization (WHO) to issue messages and guidelines to prevent and control COVID-19 in schools (UNICEF, 2020). In addition to guidance on how to prevent the disease, the messages highlighted mental health disorders facing schools. According to UNICEF, schools need to pay attention to learners' concerns and answer their questions, and social scientists need to work toward ameliorating the indirect effects of the pandemic, thereby introducing measures and policies to promote social tolerance and cohesion. Huszti and Modir (2020) pointed out that the signs and symptoms of pandemic trauma in children could be depression or anxiety, regressive behaviors such as loss of toilet skills, increased separation anxiety, sleep disorders, changed eating habits, participation in risky behaviors, loss of interest in friends and activities, self-isolation, disobedience and lower performance outcomes.

By way of example, in China, a college study found that of 478 valid online questionnaires collected, 15.5% of the students recorded symptoms of anxiety, and 32.4% reported symptoms of depression. Students in higher grades were more susceptible to anxiety or depression (Ren et al., 2021). Furthermore, Pedrelli et al. (2015) showed that students' transition from high school to college can be a stressful time for many. In addition to dealing with academic pressures, some students face the stress of separation from their families, while others may have to take on more responsibilities at home. In this context, many learners encounter mental health problems for the first time which can be exacerbated by physical illness such as that caused by COVID-19. It is clear that these problems should be addressed by effective mental health education in high schools.

In Vietnam, according to UNICEF (2018), the incidence of general mental health problems ranges from 8% to 29% for children and adolescents. An epidemiological survey on a nationally representative sample of 10 out of 63 provinces and municipalities found that the average incidence of mental health problems in children was about 12%, equivalent to more than 3 million children in need of mental health services. The most common types of mental health problems included anxiety, depression, loneliness, hyperactivity, and attention deficit disorder. The suicide rate in Vietnam was 2.3%, which is relatively low compared to the average of 9.1% found in a study (UNICEF, 2018) conducted in 90 countries. However, substance abuse is common among male Vietnamese adolescents where nearly 40% were found to smoke tobacco. According to the investigation report of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (2022), by the end of 2021, 21.7% of adolescents had mental health problems, of which 3.3% met the criteria for a mental disorder. Anxiety was the most common mental health problem (18.6%), followed by depression (4.3%). It should be noted that only 8.4% of adolescents with mental health problems have access to support or counseling services for emotional and behavioral problems. Only 5.1% of parents identified that their children needed help with these problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of adolescents, with 7.7% of adolescents stating that they often experienced at least one or more emotional or behavioral problems. The report recommended that, to support adolescents, it is important that mental health screening be integrated into existing general health services, while education and training on mental health should be provided for general practitioners.

Consequently, it is clear that since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health problems among adolescents in Vietnam have become more prevalent. This shows the importance of psychological counseling for students. In such a context, it is crucial to strengthen psychological counseling for high school students under the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to “prevent, support, and intervene with students facing psychological issues in study and life to find appropriate solutions to minimize possible negative impacts; contribute to building a safe, healthy, friendly educational environment where violence is prevented and controlled” and “assist students in practicing life skills; strengthen their will, belief, bravery and appropriate behavior in social relationships; and help train physical and mental health, contributing to developing and perfecting their personality” (MOET Vietnam, 2017, p.01

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the management of psychological counseling for high school students, this article presents the results of a field survey conducted in some high schools in Ho Chi Minh City and Hau Giang province. The research objective is to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the current management of psychological counseling activities for students in high schools and propose appropriate measures to improve the psychology of students. The research questions are: 1) What are the current psychological counseling activities for students in high schools? and 2) How have high school principals implemented the management of psychological counseling activities for students?

2. Research methodology

Based on the theoretical basis of the factors of psychological counseling activities for students (objectives, content, methods, supportive conditions for activities) and the theory of managing psychological counseling activities for students in high schools, we conducted a survey and evaluated the current situation of these activities. After analyzing the results obtained, we also proposed measures to manage psychological counseling work for students based on promoting existing advantages and overcoming existing limitations and difficulties.

A systematic review was undertaken to select scientific documents and relevant legal documents on the implementation and management of psychological counseling for high school students. Based on the literature review, we prepared a questionnaire to collect participants’ opinions on two groups of issues: i) Issue 1: Assessment of the implementation of psychological counseling for high school students, including its goals (4 questions), its implementation (5 questions), its methods (5 questions) and the assurance of support conditions (3 questions); and ii) Issue 2: Assessment of the performance of high school principals’ management functions for school psychological counseling (4 questions).

School psychological counseling activities in Vietnam are new and inequitably supplied. In Ho Chi Minh City, which is a developed economic area, psychological counseling content has been fully implemented, while schools in Hau Giang province mainly implement only basic counseling because the management functions of the schools in Hau Giang province may have fewer resources. Therefore, with a limited research time frame, we chose to investigate

the current situation in two areas: 1) In Ho Chi Minh City with 4 high schools in Thu Duc City and 520 respondents who were managers and teachers (100), students (360), and parents (60); surveying opinions of the group on Issue 1; and 2) in Hau Giang province, surveying the group on Issue 2 with 607 respondents, including 12 school administrators, 71 teachers, 262 students, and 262 parents of students in four high schools in Phung Hiep District.

The respondents were asked to rate the questions on a scale from the lowest to highest. The survey results were synthesized and processed by mathematical and statistical methods. The analysis was based on the percentage of respondents who answered each question and the weighted average score. Along with quantitative assessments derived from survey results; at the same time, through research with relevant secondary data, qualitative assessments are also added to clarify research issues together with quantitative assessments. .

3. Research results

3.1 Some theoretical issues about school psychological counseling

3.1.1 *Psychological counseling for high school students*

According to Kowalski (2003), Hoang (2014), Tran (2016), MOET Vietnam (2017), and (Edwards, 2018) psychological counseling for high school students is supposedly a process of educational orientation for students facing psychological and emotional difficulties by addressing distressing age-related issues such as problems in learning, living and career choices. The intention of psychological counseling is to provide support and advice for better solutions, thereby contributing to stabilizing students' emotional life and helping them to fulfill their aspirations.

In Vietnamese high schools, the main components of psychological counseling for students include:

- 1) In terms of goals, psychological counseling aims to achieve the following (MOET Vietnam, 2017):
 - a. Prevent and overcome problems that hinder students' physical and mental development.
 - b. Intervene to minimize the problems of violence, school bullying, school boredom, disciplinary violations, and emotional disturbances.
 - c. Build a sound and friendly educational environment.
- 2) In terms of content, psychological counseling includes (MOET Vietnam, 2017):
 - a. Study counseling to help students comply with general rules and know how to develop effective learning methods, thereby confidently making progress in learning.
 - b. Career counseling to provide students with the necessary understanding of the labor market:
 - i. To know how to choose a profession on a scientific basis.
 - ii. To become acquainted with the profession of interest and have the right attitude about the profession.

In the rapidly changing socio-economic environment, this is one of the goals that attract much attention.

- c. Counseling about gender, love and friendship in order to provide enough knowledge about:
 - i. Gender education and awareness of sexual orientation.
 - ii. Prevention of teasing, bullying and discriminating against others related to gender.
 - iii. What true love or sincere friendship is.
 - iv. Respect for each other, thereby building sound friendships and relationships.
 - d. Counseling on interpersonal relationships in family, school, society:
 - i. To help avoid disagreements with teachers, parents, and relatives.
 - ii. To develop understanding of the care of families, parents, and teachers.
 - iii. Avoid psychological confusion and the risk of engaging in negative behaviors in society.
 - e. Counseling on life values to guide and stimulate ideal behavior, ignite positive passions, and guide students to the choice of sound life values that are suitable to the national culture.
- 3) Psychological counseling for high school students often adopts the following methods (Nguyen, 2006):
- a. Motivating and mentoring students or finding a mentor to monitor and help them stabilize their psyche each time they encounter a problem.
 - b. Listening with empathy provides an understanding of what is happening to them and develops effective solutions.
 - c. Coordinating relationships between the family, school, and society to promote synergy, in which the school plays a leading role, the social community creates a stable environment and marshals' public opinion, and the family nurtures individual growth and provides a foundation for holistic development.
 - d. Demonstrating sharing and caring by using psychological and health experts to provide both guidance and interventions when necessary.
 - e. Creating closeness, confidence and trust for better understanding of mental health problems the students may be encountering.
- 4) Conditions to support psychological counseling for high school students include:
- a. Providing human resources. The core of human resources is the teaching staff. The teacher-to-student ratio needs to be adequately provided and they need to be trained in psychological counseling (Lê, 2019a) to be able to concurrently perform psychological counseling when counselors are not officially assigned at general schools.
 - b. Supplying finance and school facilities and techniques to contribute to the quality of psychological counseling (Le, 2019b). High schools must, therefore, allocate enough funding and

teaching equipment for psychological counseling, at least to reach the minimum levels of support as prescribed by the MOET.

3.1.2 Management of psychological counseling for high school students

According to Nguyen (2010), Nguyen (2012) and Tran and Nguyen (2012), the management of an educational activity has two main approaches: a functional approach to management and a content-based approach. The functional approach is largely administrative and can be approached through activity planning, implementation, direction and inspection, monitoring, and evaluation. The content-based approach can be implemented through the management of the goals, subject content, methods and conditions to support psychological counseling.

3.2 Status of psychological counseling for students

The quantitative results presented below are based on the survey results obtained at Thu Duc City (Ho Chi Minh City) high schools with the participation of 520 respondents who were managers, teachers, high school students and parents. Answers had 5 options with the lowest score of 1 and the highest score of 5; the average score was weighted by 5 levels based on the distance value (IBM, 2015): Weak [1.0 - 1.80]; average [1.8 -2.6]; good [2.6 - 3.4]; very good [3.4 - 4.2]; and excellent [4.2 - 5.0]. The processed survey results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' assessments of the management of psychological counseling for students

No.	Content of survey	Avg. score	Rating
A	Results of the implementation of psychological counseling goals for students		
1	Motivating students	4.00	1
2	Preventing events that hinder students' development	3.83	4
3	Overcoming problems that hinder student development	3.93	3
4	Building a safe, sound and friendly educational environment	3.96	2
B	Status of the implementation of psychological counseling content for students		
1	Counseling on learning methods	3.64	4
2	Career counseling	3.75	1
3	Gender, friendship and love counseling	3.64	4
4	Interpersonal relationship counseling	3.67	3
5	Life values orientation counseling	3.68	2
C	Assessment of the implementation of psychological counseling methods for students		
1	Methods of encouragement, explanation, and advice	3.59	3
2	Methods of listening, empathy, and explanation to students	3.52	4
3	Methods of coordination between family, school, and society	3.61	2
4	Methods of caring, sharing, and interventions by psychologists and medical experts	3.62	1
5	Methods of creating closeness, confidence and trust	3.40	5

No.	Content of survey	Avg. score	Rating
D	Level of satisfaction with conditions to support psychological counseling for students		
1	Managers, teachers, and staff members	3.76	3
2	Teaching facilities and equipment	4.08	1
3	Financial resources	3.81	2

The results in Table 1 reveal the following evaluations of the current situation of psychological counseling for high school students:

- Implementation of goals: In general, survey respondents were satisfied with the results of the implementation of psychological counseling goals. All four goals were rated at a good level, in which the motivation for student development was rated highest (avg. score 4, ranked 1/4). However, prevention of events that hinder student development were not highly rated (12% of respondents rated these at average level with an average score of 3.83 and ranking of 4/4).
- Assessment of the implementation of psychological counseling content: Although all five content groups were rated good, the results were lower than achieving the goal. In addition to the content, other factors such as human resources, finance, and facilities equipment were regarded as satisfactory. Career counseling content was rated best (average score of 3.75, ranked 1/5); counseling on learning methods and counseling on friendship, love, and gender was rated lowest (average score of 3.64, tied for 4/5). Survey respondents were dissatisfied with the results of some content, such as interpersonal relationship counseling with 2.7% and learning methods counseling with 2.5% of people rating the results as weak. These results reflect the reality of these activities in high school. The innovation of teaching methods has just begun and still faces difficulties. Gender and love counseling have been given attention but its progress has not been as expected.
- Regarding the results of using psychological counseling methods: Closeness, confidence, and trust-related issues to students; and listening, empathy, and explanations to students about what they encounter in life and study were not good (Average score of 3.4 and 3.52, ranking 5 and 4/5, respectively). In the training of schoolteachers, it is necessary to consider this situation to foster these skills. The method of using experts and interventions when needed was rated best (average score of 3.62 and ranking of 1/5). In addition, the method of coordination between schools, families, and society was rated 2/5 (with an average score of 3.62). Some of the methods which were rated as poor by the respondents were the method of encouragement, the method of empathic listening (both at 3.3%), and the method of closeness and confidence (2.8%). This shows that there are deficiencies in skills and professionalism in psychological counseling of some managers and teachers in high schools.
- In meeting the conditions for psychological counseling for students, the supply of human resources was assessed as the lowest (average score of 3.76 and rating of 3/3 with up to 7% of respondents thinking that it there was shortage of teachers); the facilities and means for psychological counseling

were the best rated (average score of 4.08 and rating of 1/3 with 74% of respondents saying that they had achieved above the minimum). This is understandable because of the small scale of the current psychological counseling and low demand for technical equipment.

- According to the assessment of managers, teachers, and students, the level of achievement of psychological counseling goals for high school students in Thu Duc (Ho Chi Minh City) was the most satisfactory (overall average score of 3.93/5); in which the goal of “Motivating students” was evaluated with a perfect score of 4/4, which is a very encouraging indicator in the context of severe psychological trauma after the COVID-19 pandemic. The supply of human resources, finance, and technical facilities for psychological counseling was considered good (average score of 3.88/5); while the assessment of the implementation of psychological counseling content (average score of 3.62) and the results of applying psychological counseling methods to students were low (average score of 3.55). Figure 1 shows us the achievement of the component factors (4 elements of goals, 5 elements of content, 5 factors of methods and 3 factors of conditions for supporting psychological counseling activities at high schools). Those are the points to note in the management of psychological counseling.

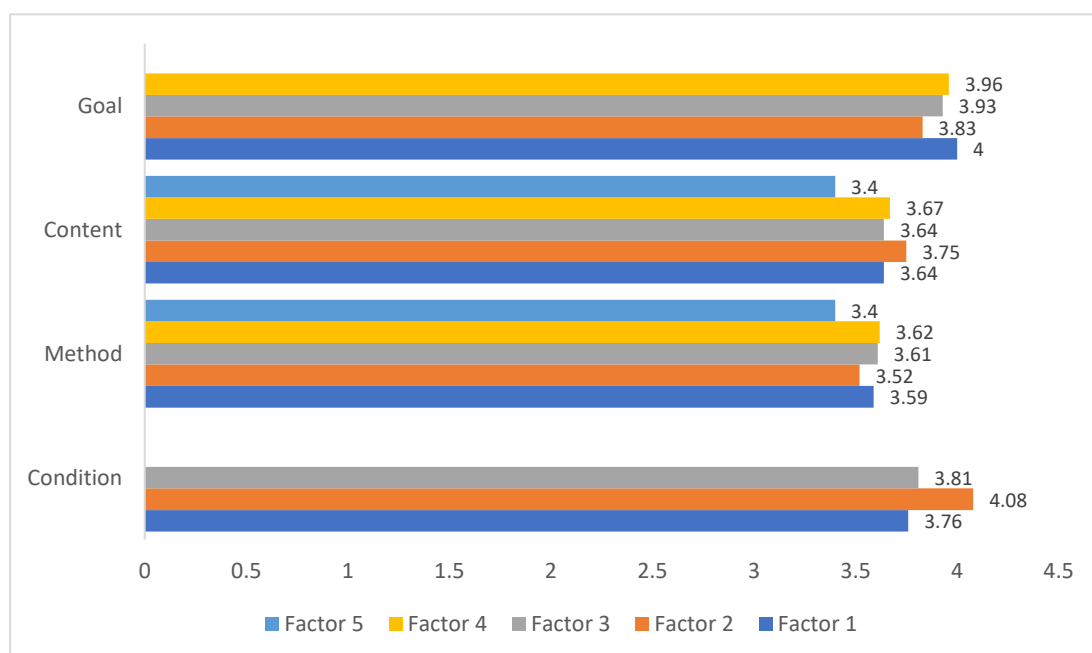


Figure 1. Correlation of results for components of psychological counseling

To further confirm the reliability of the above quantitative evaluation results, one of our collaborators combined other practical research methods such as secondary data research methods, organizing experiments... at Thu Duc high schools (Nguyen, 2021) and based on further reference to research in other regions (Nguyen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al, 2020), we present the following qualitative evaluation results:

- Regarding psychological counseling goals for students, because high schools in Vietnam are only starting implementation, the specific goals set are modest, but the assessment standards are relatively high. After the severe crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ho Chi Minh City, at the time of assessment, abnormal psychological symptoms in students were encountered but were generally considered not too serious. Compared to the disastrous impact of the pandemic, experiencing a relatively stable level of psychological trauma is extraordinary. In achieving this, schools were said to play an important role. They introduced online learning and maintained the relationship between schools and students and between students themselves, which helped considerably in stabilizing their mentality. This is why the implementation of psychological counseling goals for students in schools was highly rated. However, the weakest point was that high schools had not clearly specified counseling goals and had no specific methods to make families and society understand and agree on the coordination of the implementation.
- Regarding the content of psychological counseling, in the context of social distancing brought about by COVID-19, relationships were maintained virtually through cyberspace, and managers at all levels required the school system to focus on maintaining the connection through the Internet and social networks (such as Facebook, Zalo and Instagram) to encourage students to address feelings of loneliness, confusion and panic. Counseling content mainly focuses on relationships, friendships and humanity while the focus on learning methods and career guidance was limited and difficult to maintain. Therefore, the results of the implementation of psychological counseling content for students reflected lower results than other elements. A notable limitation is that the content of psychological counseling in schools was often poor, the resources to support the content of psychological counseling were limited, school libraries lacked books, and support activities were limited.
- Regarding psychological counseling methods for students, also due to social distancing, the methods used by teachers were mainly encouragement, explanations and consolation of students who had lost loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. The methods of coordination between the school, family, and society and creating cohesion and providing interventions by psychological counselors and medical experts were very difficult to implement. That is why the results of the implementation of psychological counseling methods were low. It is worth noting that there are very few creative and attractive methods for students. The coordination between the school, family and society was weak both in terms of approach and organization of activities.
- For human resource and financial conditions, the means of psychological counseling was highly rated, which is also understandable. Unlike other areas with difficult economic conditions, Ho Chi Minh City has a team of teachers and managers who have easy access to psychological and professional advice on updated consulting techniques; the schools' financial conditions, technical infrastructure in information technology, and user proficiency were also better than for schools in outlying areas. There was also better connectivity

through cyberspace between the school, students, and their parents. However, most schools believed that there were too few full-time teachers and those who took on the role of a psychological counselor on an ad hoc basis lacked training in professional and counseling skills. They need more training and retraining to perform their work better.

3.3 Status of management of psychological counseling for students

The survey and assessment of the management of psychological counseling for students were carried out by another researcher (Mai, 2019) in Hau Giang, a province with average socio-economic conditions, before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. This research evaluated the state of psychological counseling management under normal conditions.

Assessment of the management of psychological counseling for students was reviewed through a survey of opinions on four management functions of high school principals. The questionnaire was designed to collect the opinions of the respondents according to the following groups of activities: 1) the planning function of psychological counseling, including developing a long-term vision/strategy, planning support and developing annual plans; 2) organizing the implementation of psychological support, including resources and personnel, and planning the implementation by delegating and decentralization; 3) the leadership function of principals, including guiding the implementation, and issuing directives to urge, encourage and promote the implementation; 4) the function of inspecting and supervising the implementation and evaluating its results, including completing the evaluation criteria; delegating the responsibility for the inspection/evaluation; developing the reporting channels for the collection of information; processing information to make management decisions; and summarizing and evaluating results to draw lessons for the next management cycle.

There were 607 respondents (including 12 school administrators, 71 teachers, 262 students, and 262 parents) at four high schools in Phung Hiep District, Hau Giang Province (the number of schools selected for the survey was equal to 100% of the existing schools in Phung Hiep district). The questions aimed to evaluate the actual performance of the principal's four management functions according to 4 levels (good, good, moderate, weak) with the highest score of 4 and the lowest score of 1. The average score was calculated using the weighted average method and divided into four levels: weak with scores in the range [1-1.8], moderate [1.8-2.6], good [2.6-3.2] and good [3.2-4.0]. The results of the survey data processing are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of the performance of principals' managerial functions

No.	Evaluation criteria	Average score	Rating
1	Psychological counseling planning for high school students	3.57	3
2	Implementation of psychological counseling for high school students	3.58	2
3	Directing the implementation of psychological counseling for high school students	3.54	4

No.	Evaluation criteria	Average score	Rating
4	Examination, supervision, and evaluation of psychological counseling results for high school students	3.61	1

Compared with qualitative assessments of reports on management levels, quantitative results obtained from Table 2 are appropriate and consistent (Mai, 2019). Under normal operating conditions, the performance of high school principals' functions was achieved at a good level. In particular, the examination, supervision, and evaluation of psychological counseling for students were rated best (average score of 3.61/4.0 and ranked 1). Directing the implementation (average score of 3.54) and psychological counseling planning (average score of 3.57) are considered good, but at a lower level than other constructs.

Although the implementation of high school principals' management functions were quite optimistic, there were still some basic difficulties in management. Many managers and teachers are not fully aware of the need for psychological counseling. There was even a disregard for these activities. The coordination mechanism between families and the community was not good. A network of psychological counseling services had not yet been planned, mainly based on the availability of services at the schools or local health facilities. Access to professional counselors was limited. Therefore, students either had difficulty accessing relevant services or did not have enough trust to seek counseling services and accept psychological interventions when necessary.

3.4 Suggested solutions

Based on the issues raised in the analysis, the guidelines of the MOET on the operation of high schools (MOET Vietnam, 2020), the requirements for teacher development (MOET Vietnam, 2018a, 2018b), psychological counseling for high school students (MOET Vietnam, 2017) and suggestions from existing research (Mai, 2019; MOET, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2021), we propose some solutions to manage these activities as follows:

- 1) Raising awareness for managers and teachers about the role and importance of psychological counseling for students. Accordingly, schools should proactively integrate psychological counseling into subjects and educational activities to introduce psychology and psychological counseling, emphasizing the relationship between psychological status and student behavior; analyzing the psychological challenges and pressures that students are facing; clearly explaining the effects and benefits of psychological counseling; introducing well-known psychological counseling methods; and highlighting the role of cooperation between psychological counselors, teachers, parents, and students in creating a positive learning environment.
- 2) Building a friendly and positive educational environment: Schools should design and build a learning environment that is positive, fun and friendly. Teachers should facilitate students' focus on learning and avoid situations of conflict, violence and envy. They should develop an environment where students feel comfortable and open in talking to teachers about their problems, including their secrets and sensitive issues. To do so, teachers must be

students' true friends, be able to organize psychological counseling sessions for them, allow them to share and learn how to deal with difficult situations that they are facing; suggest solutions and share problems so that students can express their full confidence. In addition, it is necessary to support students in doing relaxation exercises to relieve stress and improve mood.

- 3) Building a network of part-time counselors and organizing professional training and retraining on psychological counseling for them. Through the regular training and retraining of teachers, high schools can equip teachers and managers with a basic knowledge of psychology (such as what psychology is, how to identify problematic psychological symptoms, and problem-solving); training in psychological counseling for students; practicing psychological counseling techniques; developing listening skills; understanding, analyzing, evaluating, recognizing and evaluating counseling results; knowing how to adjust plans and innovate counseling methods; having the ability to learn and develop their own knowledge and skills. In addition, the content of training and retraining should include regulations and legal policies related to psychological counseling in education and society.
- 4) Strengthening family, school, and social coordination in psychological counseling for students. In Vietnam, this is a very important solution to ensure its effectiveness. To do this, high schools need to determine the goals of psychological counseling and use persuasion to create agreement and acceptance of interventions by families, schools, and communities. In order to gain the support of communities, schools need to develop a psychological counseling process and create awareness among communities; devising psychological counseling programs to help families understand more about their children's moods and personalities, and develop better interactions with them to provide optimal solutions; propagating psychological counseling through media such as newspapers, TV, and the internet, thereby increasing people's understanding of the importance of psychological counseling in schools; building psychological counseling programs suitable for students to help them overcome difficulties and improve their capacity for better study results. Schools should also organize group activities so that students can interact with each other and feel connected to their community. This can help students effectively solve some of their psychological problems.
- 5) Providing psychological resources: Students need to be provided with relevant learning materials by teachers and schools so that they can study on their own and learn methods to solve their problems. Psychological counselors should create a list of psychological materials suitable for high school students, help schools build a list of books on psychological problems, establish reading and counseling corners for students, and use appropriate methods of developing knowledge about psychology and skills to handle psychological problems themselves.
- 6) Providing easy access to psychological counseling and timely intervention when needed: Teachers and school staff should be available to receive and help students at all times, especially in difficult situations. In addition,

mechanisms should be created so that students can easily reach out to psychologists for support when needed.

4. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has created severe psychological trauma in society in general and in schools in particular. In order for learning to return to normal, psychological counseling activities in high schools are becoming extremely important at present. Therefore, research to identify strengths and weaknesses in managing psychological counseling activities for students is becoming urgent and of interest to many sectors of society.

Psychological counseling services for high school students in Vietnam are relatively new and face several shortcomings in terms of implementation, organization, and creativity. Teachers lack proper training in the professional skills required for psychological counseling. The requirements for the implementation and management of these services are not particularly demanding, yet schools still fall short in terms of integration of these services into their school programs and coherence between them, resulting in an unprofessional approach. Consequently, while the management of psychological counseling for high school students may be considered satisfactory, it fails to address the multitude of challenges arising from the increasingly diverse and complex psychological needs of students. Thus, the current situation calls for careful consideration and effective measures to address the numerous issues at hand.

From the results of the assessment of the current situation by a sample of participants from high schools in Ho Chi Minh City and Hau Giang province and the results drawn from summary reports, evaluation documents of levels and sectors, we have proposed six solutions for managing psychological counseling activities for students in high schools. Although testing of the solutions has not yet been done, these solutions have been shown by some researchers (Mai, 2019; Nguyen, 2021) to be feasible, hopefully providing guidelines for implementation in areas with similar conditions in Vietnam.

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