




## Evaluation of Students' Counseling Needs: A Quantitative Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The need for counseling and guidance is felt throughout life for all individuals, especially students. The aim of this study was to evaluate Iranian students' counseling needs.

**Methods and Materials:** This research is applied in terms of purpose, and the researcher's approach in organizing studies has been meta-analysis with an exploratory process. For collecting information appropriate to the research strategy, the systematic review method has been used. In this regard, through an internet search in scientific databases including Google Scholar, Jihad Daneshgahi website, ENSANI Portal, Noormags, and Civilica, efforts were made to collect published studies in the field under investigation. The results of this stage led to the identification and selection of 21 research works in the period from 2001 to 2021 that had the most thematic relevance to the present study. After screening the identified articles, 7 articles that had more similarities and consistency in terms of structure, content, and methodology compared to the other 14 articles were selected for analysis. The statistical sample of this study includes 2031 individuals, with the majority, 57.5%, being female and 42.5% male.

**Findings:** According to the selected articles, students' counseling needs were categorized and examined in five areas: personal growth and development, occupational needs, educational needs, family and marriage needs, and emotional and psychological needs. The results confirmed the significant impact of all these five categories as essential counseling needs for students.

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that the needs and guidance required by students can be considered in several categories, and many of these needs can be addressed through empowerment and increasing students' resilience.

**Keywords:** Student Counseling, Educational Needs, Occupational Needs, Personal Growth and Development, Emotional Needs.

## 1. Introduction

Guidance is a dynamic effort that aids individuals in self-awareness and understanding their surroundings, facilitating growth in all aspects and enabling individuals to make informed decisions. According to the definition provided by the Iranian Counseling Association, counseling is a process based on a supportive, face-to-face, and professional relationship through which a competent counselor uses specialized knowledge and skills to facilitate the growth, problem-solving, and change of their clients (Fatemy et al., 2020). In fact, guidance helps in preventing the emergence of problems, while counseling assists in solving existing issues (Ramli et al., 2021).

Students, upon entering university and encountering subsequent life events during their studies, face numerous academic, developmental, behavioral, emotional, familial, social, and occupational problems. Clearly, entering university as a new experience, alongside issues such as new academic conditions, different interpersonal relationships, a new and unfamiliar living environment, leaving the family, etc., affects students' adaptation (Feyzipoor et al., 2018; Moshtaghi & Kazemiyani Moghadam, 2018). Many studies conducted on students indicate that their needs are increasing. Furthermore, depending on their socio-economic status, gender, socio-cultural conditions, and subcultures they belong to, their challenges vary (Purnama et al., 2020).

Addressing these problems is crucial for students, and failing to control them leads to a decline in academic performance and educational achievement, creating problems not only for the student and their family but also causing significant losses to society and the country. Therefore, providing counseling and guidance services in universities becomes essential (Shakurnia et al., 2015).

The goals of student counseling centers in universities are to help clients better understand themselves to enhance thinking and elevate capabilities, make important life decisions, and prevent problems that can lead to deep emotional-cognitive disorders (Schwitzer et al., 2018). Universities have a critical responsibility in educating and training students. Students face many academic, developmental, behavioral, emotional, familial, social, and occupational problems after entering university and during their studies. Addressing these problems is of great importance, and failure to control them results in lower academic performance and educational achievement, causing issues not only for the student and their family but also leading to significant losses for society and the country.

Thus, providing counseling and guidance services in universities is necessary (Zamani et al., 2024).

Guidance and counseling are associated with education, the growth process, identifying and solving problems, teaching correct decision-making methods, coping with life events, and achieving life satisfaction. They lead to expanded insights, resolving internal conflicts, and developing constructive relationships with others (Dogar et al., 2011; Shabani et al., 2022). Access to counseling services for students is not limited to crisis situations; rather, considering the increasing complexity and breadth of various life aspects, counseling services must evolve to match this complexity and breadth. Identifying the specific areas in which students need guidance is a primary concern for counseling practitioners. Identifying needs is a process known as needs assessment (Moshtaghi & Kazemiyani Moghadam, 2018).

Regarding the present study, some research has been conducted. Cohen et al. (2022) concluded in their research that both students and physicians recognized the need for stress management and mental health support outside counseling sessions (Cohen et al., 2022). Students and physicians identify the barriers to face-to-face treatment and are keen to collaborate to identify opportunities to overcome these mental health service barriers. Setyawati et al. (2022) found in their study that 98.6% of students needed counseling and guidance services. These services included emotional, cognitive, social, ethical, and religious needs, respectively (Setiowati & Nuryanto, 2022). Shabani et al. (2022) discovered that individual and occupational needs were the most prominent counseling needs, while emotional and familial needs were the least significant for students (Shabani et al., 2022). Shakurnia et al. (2015) concluded in their study that the average priority of students' counseling needs, in order of importance, were personal growth and development, occupational needs, educational needs, family and marriage, and emotional and psychological needs, which were significantly higher among female students than male students (Shakurnia et al., 2015). Dogar et al. (2011) found that students seek guidance and counseling in occupational and emotional areas, with the highest need for professional guidance among high school students (45%). Students need to choose a job or field of study they are interested in after completing their education (Dogar et al., 2011). Moshtaghi and Kazemian Moghadam (2018) concluded in their research that the five important needs of students include familiarity with job opportunities in the country, job search methods in society, methods to increase concentration, ways

to deal with life problems, and methods to live happily (Moshtaghi & Kazemiyani Moghadam, 2018).

Guidance and counseling programs in universities can be categorized into five areas: academic guidance and counseling, career guidance and counseling, family and marriage counseling, emotional adjustment counseling, and personal development counseling (Purnama et al., 2020). Various studies have been conducted in these areas, yielding different results. The research gap is that the meta-analysis methodology has been less considered by researchers, and currently, specific results cannot be stated. Recognizing the needs and guidance of students, as an important segment of society and a guarantee for the country's development and progress, is more important than ever and requires understanding. Therefore, this study aims to identify common themes in these studies, focusing on students' counseling needs, and analyze the quality of each. The questions this research seeks to answer are:

- What are the essential areas of Iranian students' counseling needs with a meta-analytic approach?
- What is the position of these areas in the selected studies with a meta-analytic approach?
- What is the priority of these areas with a meta-analytic approach?

**2. Methods and Materials**

This research is applied in terms of purpose, and the researcher's approach in organizing studies has been meta-analysis with an exploratory process. The term meta-analysis was first used by Glass in 1976. Due to the breadth of studies conducted in each area, this method helps extract a unified

result. For collecting information appropriate to the research strategy, the systematic review method has been used. A systematic review is a tool for comprehensive study, interpretation, and analysis of texts. In this regard, through an internet search in scientific databases, including Google Scholar, Jihad Daneshgahi website, Humanities Database, Noormags, and Civilica, efforts were made to collect published studies in the field under investigation. The results of this stage led to the identification and selection of 21 research works in the period from 2001 to 2021 that had the most thematic relevance to the present study. After screening the identified articles, 7 articles that had more similarities and consistency in terms of structure, content, and methodology compared to the other 14 articles were selected for analysis. The criteria for selecting these studies follow the proposed method by Tabaneh (2004), which defines the following indicators for selection:

- Study with a sufficient sample size,
- Appropriate measurement tools with necessary reliability and validity,
- Scientific credibility of the research,
- Appropriate sampling method.

**3. Findings and Results**

In this study, initially, 21 related articles were identified. Among these articles, 7 that had the most structural, content, and methodological alignment were selected for analysis. The selected articles revealed that all of them categorized and examined the issue of students' need for counseling into five domains, which were not observed in the other identified articles. Table 1 shows these domains.

**Table 1**

*Domains of Students' Counseling Needs*

Row	Counseling Needs Domains	Frequency in Selected Studies	Percentage
1	Personal Growth and Development	7	100%
2	Occupational Needs	7	100%
3	Educational Needs	7	100%
4	Family and Marriage	7	100%
5	Emotional and Psychological Needs	7	100%

In meta-analysis studies, it is important to determine the characteristics of the factors and variables examined in the selected studies. Table 2 shows these characteristics regarding the selected studies in the present research. The geographical locations of the studies were mostly scattered across the central, western, and southwestern regions of the

country. The statistical sample of this study includes 2031 individuals, with the majority, 57.5%, being female and 42.5% male. The statistic used in all studies except for study number 4, which used R, was T.

for this test is that if the significance level (Sig) is less than 0.05, the data are normal; if it is greater than 0.05, the

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Information of the Studies Examined*

Study Number	Location	Sample Size	Male	Female	Statistic Used	Value
1	Rafsanjan	372	183	198	T	2.12
2	Semnan	179	57	122	T	3.77
3	Dezful	375	205	170	T	2.36
4	Hamedan	144	86	58	R	0.555
5	Kermanshah	300	99	196	T	3.28
6	Ahvaz	270	113	167	T	4.71
7	Ahvaz	391	134	257	T	3.71
Total		2031	877	1168		

Among the 7 reviewed articles in this study, 1 used the correlation test and 6 used the t-test. In the present study, the statistic related to each of the domains from each study was entered into the CMA2 software, and the effect size for each was calculated. This value for each domain is shown in the

table below. After calculating the effect size, researchers often question whether this effect size is appropriate for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis. Cohen (1997) proposed intervals for quick reference, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Effect Size Intervals*

Effect Size	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
Small	0.3	0.1
Medium	0.5	0.3
Large	0.8	0.5

The following table (Table 4) presents the descriptive information and effect size of the examined domains.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Information and Effect Size of Examined Domains*

Row	Counseling Needs Domains	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	P	Effect Size
1	Personal Growth and Development	2.84	0.95	2.88	0.003	0.52
2	Occupational Needs	3.21	1.62	3.01	0.011	0.58
3	Educational Needs	2.73	0.86	2.75	0.013	0.46
4	Family and Marriage	3.05	1.08	3.36	0.021	0.37
5	Emotional and Psychological Needs	2.88	1.21	3.11	0.037	0.33

Based on the results in Table 4 and according to Cohen's scale, none of the domains fall within the 0.1 to 0.3 range. The domains of educational needs, family and marriage, and emotional and psychological needs, with effect sizes of 0.46, 0.37, and 0.33 respectively, fall within the 0.3 to 0.5 range, indicating a medium effect size. The domains of occupational needs and personal growth and development, with effect sizes of 0.58 and 0.52 respectively, fall within the 0.5 to 0.8 range, indicating a high effect size.

Based on Table 4, the research hypotheses can be formulated and examined as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Personal growth and development is one of the essential needs of students for counseling in the university.

H0: Personal growth and development is not an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

H1: Personal growth and development is an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

According to the results in Table 4, the effect size for the need for personal growth and development was 0.52, indicating a high need among the studied students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: Occupational needs are one of the essential needs of students for counseling in the university.

H0: Occupational needs are not an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

H1: Occupational needs are an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

According to the results in Table 4, the effect size for occupational needs was 0.58, indicating a high need among the studied students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis 3: Educational needs are one of the essential needs of students for counseling in the university.

H0: Educational needs are not an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

H1: Educational needs are an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

According to the results in Table 4, the effect size for educational needs was 0.46, indicating a medium need among the studied students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis 4: Family and marriage needs are one of the essential needs of students for counseling in the university.

H0: Family and marriage needs are not an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

H1: Family and marriage needs are an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

According to the results in Table 4, the effect size for family and marriage needs was 0.37, indicating a medium need among the studied students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis 5: Emotional and psychological needs are one of the essential needs of students for counseling in the university.

H0: Emotional and psychological needs are not an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

H1: Emotional and psychological needs are an essential need for students for counseling in the university.

According to the results in Table 4, the effect size for emotional and psychological needs was 0.37, indicating a medium need among the studied students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed.

**Table 5**

*Ranking of Needs*

Counseling Needs Domains	Rank
Occupational Needs	1
Personal Growth and Development	2
Educational Needs	3
Family and Marriage	4
Emotional and Psychological Needs	5

According to Table 5, occupational needs, with an effect size of 0.58, form the highest counseling need for students at a high level, followed by personal growth and development needs with an effect size of 0.52 at a high level. Educational needs, family and marriage needs, and emotional and psychological needs are ranked third to fifth, respectively.

**4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to evaluate Iranian students. The findings showed that students' counseling needs were categorized and examined in five domains: personal growth and development, occupational needs, educational needs, family and marriage needs, and emotional and psychological needs. The results confirmed the significant impact of all these five categories as essential counseling needs for

students. These findings are consistent with prior studies (Fatemy et al., 2020; Moshtaghi & Kazemiyani Moghadam, 2018; Purnama et al., 2020; Setiowati & Nuryanto, 2022; Shabani et al., 2022; Shakurnia et al., 2015; Zamani et al., 2024).

In explaining the results, it must be said that the most significant need of students is in the area of occupational needs. Job satisfaction is one of the important factors that must be precisely considered in economic development. A person's job not only meets material needs but also satisfies them psychologically. Therefore, examining the personal characteristics of individuals is necessary. Otherwise, we will witness reduced productivity and efficiency, leading to the loss of human resources. In this regard, familiarizing students with topics such as job opportunities in the country,

job search methods in society, entrepreneurship and self-employment methods, awareness of existing jobs in society, ways to strengthen proper work habits, methods of adapting to a job, and recognizing their job interests can help them better understand their future careers and prepare them for post-graduation conditions (Ikonomopoulos et al., 2021).

The second priority of students' counseling needs was identified as personal growth and development. Given that many of the problems of students in the university environment can be traced to individual, developmental, and relational issues, the importance of education in the fields of personal growth and development for students is critically necessary, and it is essential that authorities pay attention to this as one of the important needs of students for counseling. In this domain, topics such as ways to live happily, methods of self-defense, how to think creatively, ways to increase self-confidence, appropriate ways to express feelings, methods of understanding others and helping them, ways to value and respect oneself, methods of accepting criticism, accepting others and being accepted by others, and how to establish proper relationships with others during the study period can help improve personal skills and their development (Yurayat & Seechaliao, 2021).

According to the results, the third domain of students' counseling needs is educational issues. Concerns such as attending classes, passing exams, completing class projects, lack of time, and wrong decisions in choosing courses are among the issues that challenge the quality of education and learning for students during their studies. Therefore, university authorities can empower students in educational matters by familiarizing and educating them on topics such as how to schedule their coursework, ways to reduce exam anxiety, methods of time management, understanding educational regulations and guidelines, ways to motivate study, exam-taking skills, proper study methods, optimal use of time, and ways to increase concentration.

The next domain of need is family and marriage counseling. It should be noted that marriage counseling at university must be conducted so wisely and intelligently that the student knows what to do. Although marriage during student life has benefits, it also comes with challenges and problems. This is where the role of the university and student counseling centers becomes important. For instance, if a deep feeling develops between couples, the need for marriage counseling at the university becomes more prominent. Also, interactions between two individuals may occur that could get out of control. Sometimes, two people may be unaware of some issues because of their involvement

in the relationship. This neglect can lead to events and consequences that cannot be repaired in married life. Therefore, a counselor, as an informed person, should have control over the relationship (Musso et al., 2022).

The fifth domain, which is important in terms of counseling needs for students, is emotional and psychological needs. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors in the growth and development of students' talents is their mental health. Students, like other people, may suffer from psychological and emotional disorders. Although students are usually considered the elite of society, they can still suffer from various disorders and emotional problems or develop them during their studies. Some environmental conflicts that affect the psychological and emotional health of students include the desire for multiple social entertainments versus the tendency to study, the need to succeed in studies against feelings of inadequacy, fear of expressing personality versus the desire for showmanship, the desire to marry against obstacles preventing it, the desire for physical superiority against physical limitations, obedience to aggressive individuals, problems in interacting with the opposite sex, hatred of others' behavior versus the inability to express one's feelings, economic problems hindering artistic and scientific goals, and choosing a career. In this context, the role of student counseling and counseling centers is crucial and decisive, just like in the previous four domains (Fatemy et al., 2020).

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

All studies face limitations. The lack of very precise tools for diagnosing students' needs and required guidance prevents more accurate results. Additionally, students in different fields and educational levels may have different counseling needs, which has not been addressed in the conducted studies, and these differences cannot be examined here either. It is suggested that future researchers use both quantitative and qualitative meta-analysis methods and analyze a large number of studies. One of the students' needs was in the emotional and psychological domain. In this context, educating students and familiarizing them with topics such as the correct way to interact with the opposite sex, proper behavior during engagement, proper proposal methods, how to help family members, ways to create harmony between spouse and parents, marriage rituals after marriage, and parenting methods can empower students in family and marriage matters. Another suggestion is that providing training on adapting to the new university

environment, methods of dealing with suspicion and paranoia, ways to say no to unreasonable demands, methods of coping with anger and aggression, methods of dealing with depression, ways of dealing with intrusive thoughts, methods of coping with life stresses, methods of solving doubt and indecision, and ways of dealing with life's problems can empower students to cope with psychological and emotional issues.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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### Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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