

Vocational Self-Concept among Education Counselors in Public Schools in Northern Governorates of Palestine

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the vocational self-concept among education counselors in public schools in the northern governorates of Palestine in the second semester of the school year 2014-2015. Besides, it aimed to outline the effect of specific variables, such as gender, specialization, qualification and work experience, on the level of vocational self-concept among those education counselors. The researcher used a questionnaire, as a study instrument, which consisted of 60 items that incorporated five dimensions, namely, knowledge, professional performance, personality traits, mentality, and appreciation of others. The validity and internal consistency of this measurement instrument was assessed, where the reliability coefficient score was 0.93. The study sample consisted of 150 public school counselors, which represented almost 50% of the study population. According to the study results, personality traits were first, knowledge was second, professional performance was third, mentality was fourth, and appreciation by others was fifth. The results indicated that there were significant differences in the variable of gender in terms of knowledge and personality traits in favour of males. There were significant differences in the variable of qualification in terms of knowledge and appreciation by others in favour of master degrees and above. There were no significant differences at the levels of specialization and work experience. The most important recommendations included the need to introduce a bachelor's degree program for educational counseling in the Palestinian universities, setting up clear, specific educational counselling standards with integrated academic counselor's mental dimensions, and the development of the education counselor's role in line with school employees' roles.

Key words: vocational self-concept, education counselors, northern Palestine

Introduction:

The educational counselling programmes gained extraordinary significance in the educational process in Palestine. The Palestinian Ministry of Education has recently exerted great efforts to bolster students' beliefs, develop their potential and abilities, and facilitate their mental adjustment. Therefore, a professional education counselor is quite essential for providing adequate counseling services. To achieve these outcomes, a counselor should preferably have certain characteristics. For example, he should have a reliable self-concept and an ability to provide the students with effective counseling services. According to Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is 'the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.'

Since the advent of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the Palestinian educational system has evolved and several programmes have been introduced, including the public school educational counselling. In fact, the educational counselling constituted a pilot experience under the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MOE), which inaugurated the Educational Counselling Department. Since 1996, the ministry employed School Guidance and Counseling Department Administrator as an integral part of each regional Directorate of Education, along with the public school education counsellors. (Musleh, 1998: 7)

The counselling field is part of the disciplines of the Applied Psychology graduate programs. It stems from interaction of various cognitive fields, including psychology, sociology and education, which have contributed to emergence and development of education counselling and guidance. As a discipline, the educational counselling requires the practitioners to have adequate knowledge in its applied methods and applications. Qualified counselors who provide therapy in school settings must have classroom-teaching experience in addition to flexibility and expertise in practical counselling techniques, so that they can offer students hands-on experience in school settings. (Al-Asdi and Ibrahim, 2003: 7)

The school counselor possesses academic and field experience, and with this, he can provide fundamental counseling and guidance to all components of the school setting, including students, teachers, headmasters and administrative staff.

He plays a major role in providing students with professional psychological, pedagogical, and social guidance, which can help them enhance their characters and cope with school challenges. (Aqel, 2004: 19)

Choosing school counselling, as a profession, requires vocational self-concept, which refers to the individual's ability to discern the differences between the prospective professional settings based on personality traits and the level of self-concept. (Al-Dahiri, 2005: 61).

The academic counselor has predispositions through his own professional self-knowledge and his relationship with others. His personality traits, personal mood and thinking style have immense effects on his professional performance and eventually on his career. Therefore, the vocational settings and personality traits are an integrated part of his professional self-knowledge. Holland's theory of career choice proposes that people express their personality through their career choices and that means that vocational preferences are expressions of personality at work settings. Holland's theory places an emphasis and accuracy on self-knowledge and knowledge of careers to make necessary decisions regarding one's occupational choice. (Aqel, 2004: 103).

The vocational self-concept is how an individual thinks about his/her work, which can be either positive or negative for many considerations (Abu Asaad Al-Hawwari, 2008: 115).

When the personal self-concept fits in well with vocational self-concept, people tend to excel in their professions. However, people who have low self-concept have difficulties in taking necessary decisions regarding their own occupational choices (Al-Dahiri, 2005: 138).

According to Donald Super, vocational self-concept changes over time and develops as a result of work experience. His theory presents the career process as one in which a person is confronted with various stages that he or she must undergo and complete before moving on to the next stage. Career patterns are determined by mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and the opportunities to which persons are exposed. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves, implement and develop their own vocational self-concepts. (Rasmi, 2004: 91)

This review shows that the individual conceptualizes the right work, develops his own vocational self-concept, and defines his career objectives through his self-consciousness of his attitudes, preferences and personal attributes.

In view of that, the researcher ponders that the vocational self-concept is an awareness of one's knowledge, abilities, ambitions, personal attributes, and career status at work.

The vocational self-concept has thus various dimensions.

The vocational knowledge: this dimension includes information and knowledge about things and people. Such information, as a fundamental component of human civilization, incorporates a set of data, references, knowledge and content, which represents a thing or an issue. We need to divulge into the world of knowledge through using modern technologies. (Hathnawi, 2009: 2).

The researcher points out that vocational knowledge is all what an individual realizes, including theoretical knowledge, ideas and expertise, which are acquired through his interaction with others in the surrounding environment or in the career settings.

The professional performance: this dimension refers to the actual behavior and methods which the community members use to definite the situation. Blamer defines it as the right description of the human interaction where an individual shows patterns of desirable behavior (Rasmi, 2004: 250).

Job performance is one of the most important variables of work. Nearly all business organizations are interested in following up, monitoring and measuring this variable more than any other. Ultimately, this leads to better efficiency and productivity for the organisation, as well as improved career prospects for the individual. (Raskin, 1999: 13)

According to the researcher, professional performance is the individual's ability to employ his capabilities and experiences at work along with his ability to communicate and interact effectively with others in the work settings.

The psychological dimension: workplace and job adaptation of an individual depends on certain physical abilities and dispositions, emotional aptitudes, personality traits and characteristics, which judge his own interaction with his fellow workers. Thus, the individual's success relies on his beliefs about himself, including how others think about him or her (Abu Hammad, 2008: 239). According to Goleman, Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability to identify, assess and control the emotions of oneself, of others and of groups. Career success requires a set of emotional capacities including the self-awareness, ability to control instincts and emotions, and understanding feelings of others during interaction. (Goleman, 2005: 86).

The researcher believes the psychological dimension is as important as the mental and professional capacities for the individual's professional adjustment.

Ambition: this dimension is an important component of the professional self-efficacy. It is the most important tool for achieving success, so an ambitious attitude can lead to job success and satisfaction. Those who are fueled by ambition to work hard, endeavor to enhance their professional self-efficacy, and make the sacrifices will usually come out on top.

According to Patrick, professional self-efficacy is the orderly growth of knowledge, skills, experiences and codified behavior models, which the practitioner acquires during his career, contributing to higher rates of performance in different occupational situations. (Patrick, 2005: 5)

Vocational values and ethics: this dimension includes all kinds of ethical behaviors, attitudes and values, which an individual needs thorough his career, such as job satisfaction and loyalty, professional conscience, sacrifice, tolerance, humility and good model. (Bin Issa, 2008: 3)

Social status: an individual's status and importance is mainly determined by his profession. The community grants the individuals their prominence depending on the jobs and ranks, thus, people compete to gain the highest status and rank by making every effort to excel at work. It is quite acknowledged that losing a social status would lead to wide disrespect, which might lead to personality disorder and dissatisfaction. (Ghannam, 2005: 52)

Appreciation by others: the vocational self-concept of an individual is determined by his relationship with his fellow workers. So having a positive attitude in the workplace can help him get a promotion, succeed in projects, meet goals, and just generally enjoy the job more. A friendly and positive attitude towards others refers to his ability to be flexible besides adjustment with new tasks and coworkers, even though this may largely depends on his emotional and personality traits, leading to fruitful interaction with coworkers. (Abdul Azim & Nada, 1988: 80)

A profession plays an important role in satisfying the human needs for love, belonging and appreciation. Therefore, a homogeneous work team makes the individual feels that he is an effective teamwork member, accepted and appreciated. (Abu Hammad, 2008: 242).

From the above analysis it is quite evident that vocational self-concept includes knowledge (information and knowledge), professional performance (skills and techniques), awareness (moods and emotional attributes), professional ambition and values (ethics), social status and appreciation by others.

Here is a brief summary of the previous literature on the vocational self-concept.

The Study of Hijazi (2013) aimed at recognizing self-efficiency, vocational adjustment, and performance quality levels among resource room teacher in the West Bank public schools, in addition to identifying the nature of the relationship between the overall score and the dimensions of self-efficiency, vocational adjustment, and performance quality scales. The sample consisted of 45 resources room teachers working during the school year 2011-2012. Three self-developed scales (i.e. self-efficiency, vocational adjustment, and performance quality) were administered. The study results showed that while self-efficiency exceeded 80% as a supposed level, vocational adjustment and performance quality levels were lower than 80%. Moreover, the study revealed that there was a correlational relationship between the overall score and the dimensions of self-efficiency, vocational adjustment excluding social adjustment, and performance quality scales. There were statistically significant differences between the average scores of high self-efficient teachers and the average scores of low self-efficient teachers in vocational adjustment and performance quality scales.

The study of Adebomi *et al* (2012) examined job satisfaction, self-efficacy as correlates of job commitment of special education teachers in Oyo State. Four research questions were generated in the study. A sample of 250 special education teachers was used to ascertain or otherwise the job satisfaction and self-efficacy as correlates of job commitment. The results revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between job satisfaction and commitment, as well as between self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Further, the study revealed that job satisfaction and self-efficacy when combined together were reliable predictors.

The study of Abeer Al Shurafa (2011) aimed to identify the vocational self-concept among education counselors who work in the educational counseling in the Gaza strip. The researcher used the descriptive analytical method. The study population consisted of 352 education counselors in the public schools in the governorates of the Gaza Strip in the year 2009-2010. The study revealed that the dimension of personality attributes was first, social dimension was second, professional ambition was third, professional values was fourth, knowledge was fifth, psychology was sixth, professional performance was seventh, appreciation of others was eighth . The study showed that there were no statistically significant differences due to the variables of gender, school level and educational district. However, there were statistically significant differences due to the variables of qualification, discipline, training courses, and computer skills.

The study of Al-Fahjan (2010) aimed to identify the compatibility of professional and social responsibility and their relationship to the ego flexibility of special education teachers in special education institutions in the districts of Gaza. The study population consisted of 287 special education teachers. The results indicated that the level of occupational adjustment and ego flexibility was above average whereas the level of social responsibility was high.

The study of Nichter, Li, and Serres (2007) aimed to determine the level of implementation of the national standards in Texas public school counseling programs. One thousand school counselors were selected and nearly half, 49.5% (n = 495) of the 1000 surveys were completed and returned. In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, an original survey instrument was developed by the author. The results showed that Texas school counselors at all levels shared

their commitment to acquire knowledge and expertise to promote academic achievement and the development of positive competition among their students. In primary and secondary schools, they also supported students' development of personal qualities and assisted them to obtain and practice interpersonal skills.

The study of Abdul Al Jawad (2006) addressed the counselling self-efficacy among school psychologists and its relationship to school climate. The study population consisted of 169 school therapists from the districts of Fayum, Beni Suef, Cairo, and Giza. The researcher used Hoffman, Hill, and Lent (2003) *Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale* together with his own school climate survey. The results revealed that there was a correlation between the school psychologist's self-efficacy and his views towards the surrounding climate. These views included training and experience levels, management support, relationship with students and parents, and work environment potentials.

The study of Ibrahim (2005) aimed to identify self-efficacy as correlates of professional efficiency and work-related stress, which are related to the teaching, beliefs about education among primary school teachers, and students of teacher training colleges in Saudi Arabia. The study sample consisted of 200 teachers and students. The results revealed that there was a positive correlation between self-efficacy, professional efficiency and pedagogical beliefs. There was an inverse (negative) correlation between teachers' professional efficiency and work-related stress. There were significant differences in the levels of self-efficacy as correlates of professional efficiency, work-related stress, and beliefs about education in favour of primary school teachers.

Kocarek (2001) examined the relationships among counseling self-efficacy, anxiety, developmental level, course work, experience, and counselor performance. The sample consisted of 117 counselor trainees and 82 supervisors in educational counselling. The study found out that counseling-related experience was a stronger predictor of high level of counseling self-efficacy. Findings revealed that counseling self-efficacy, anxiety, developmental level, number of courses and amount of counseling experience together predicted counselor performance. The main recommendation of the study was the need for counselor's in-service professional training and development.

Hillman (2001) carried out an analysis of role perceptions and job satisfaction of secondary-school counselors. The sample consisted of 35 education counselors, 35 principals, 100 teachers and 200 students. The study instrument was a questionnaire, which consisted of 37 items. The study results indicated that there were significant differences in the perceptions of counselors, principals, teachers, and students about the counselor's ideal role; counselor's perceptions were different from those of students and teachers, too. The study recommended the need to reach a unanimous perspective towards the development of counseling theories and criteria, and that a counselor must have a set of principles to rely on.

Goodnough *et al* (2001) investigated how the counseling educators prepare entry-level school counseling students to meet their future job requirements. The sample consisted of 232 counseling students in certain American universities. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: multiple-choice and open-ended. The results showed that universities should offer advanced courses in counseling research and measurement, and that counselors should be trained to acquire counseling skills and methods about the guided people.

Abu Al-Nasr (1999) assessed professional self-development methods among social workers, and the level of utilizing these professional self-development methods for all specialists who work in Nasr City, Maadi, Shubra, and Al-Miraj in the district of Cairo. The researcher used a questionnaire that consisted of 60 items. The findings showed that the majority of social workers were dissatisfied with their jobs, and that their number in one school immensely exceeded their workload.

Gillespie and Hillman (1993) explored the impact of several aspects of self-efficacy expectations in relation to vocational expectations of high school students. The sample consisted of 224 high school students. Students completed the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale. According to the study findings, males reported lower career self-efficacy estimates and restricted consideration of cross-gender options, as compared to females.

In Kelly's study (1993), gender and academic achievement were studied in relation to career self-efficacy and interests. The study sample consisted of 286 male and female students. The study found out that the overall influence of gender on career self-efficacy was quite modest. Achievement was found to be a more powerful predictor of career self-efficacy than gender.

From the previous review, the researcher noted that most of the previous studies focused on studying self-concept in relation to vocational adjustment, development and experience. In addition, they examined the levels of vocational self-concept, vocational adjustment, self-efficacy, and career development. They presented a set of important findings on the positive or negative correlations between vocational self-concept and vocational adjustment.

This study was distinguished from other studies in that it constituted a turning point in the research about self-concept in general and the vocational self-concept among education counselors in northern Palestine in particular. The researcher explored and reviewed scores of previous studies on school counselors, and examined the issue of vocational self-concept from several perspectives. The educational counseling has been established since the advent of the PNA. He

stressed on the need to study the situation of these educational employees, since they directly dealt with students' problems during the hard circumstances incurred by the Palestinians.

Research problem and questions:

During his working in the domain of educational counselling in public schools in Tulkarm area, the researcher observed that a number of school counsellors carried out various administrative practices which were not pertinent to their duties or functions. The so-called list of 'practices that school counselors are deemed to avoid' included on-duty tasks, filing warnings and pledges, participating in students' assembly, giving lessons, and collecting fees. Such practices unfavorably affected their professional implementation of the prescribed educational counselling.

The research problem could be well defined in the main question: "*What is the level of the vocational school counselors' self-concept in their educational counselling?*"

Research hypotheses:

The purpose of this study was to examine the following zero hypotheses:

There were no significant differences at the level of (.05 (\leq)) between the average means of the levels of professional self-concept from perspectives of the counselors due to the variables of gender (male, female), discipline (psychology, sociology, social work, educational counselling), qualification (Bachelor, master or above), and work experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16 years and above).

Research objectives:

1. To define vocational self-concept of the education counselors in public schools in northern areas of Palestine.
2. To determine the education counselors' understanding of the vocational self-concept.
3. To define the significant differences in average means of the public school counselors on the vocational self-concept scale in terms of gender, discipline, qualification, work experience and district.

Research significance:

1. The importance of this research lied in the education counselors' vocational self-concept and its relationship to certain variables; vocational self-concept was very important variable in the development of counselor's professional performance.
2. It was the first research on the issue of the education counselors' vocational self-concept in Palestine (researcher's knowledge).
3. This study identified the dimensions of vocational self-concept so that educational counselors could detect and enhance their strengths through supplementary knowledge and experience.

Research limitations:

Although this research was carefully prepared, the researcher was still aware of its limitations and shortcomings.

- A. The population of the experimental group was only the school counselors in the northern governorates (Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Nablus, Jenin, Qabatiya, Jenin, Nablus, and Salfit).
- B. The participants were academic counselors from the public schools in the academic year 2014-2015.
- C. This study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015.
- D. The research topic was limited to the education counselors' vocational self-concept in the West Bank public schools.

Research terminology:

1. *Vocational self-concept*: according to Sana Zahran, it is how the individual perceives his job and his occupational settings (Zahran, 1996:17).

The researcher defined it as the individual's view of his knowledge, experience, skills, activities, personality traits and appreciation of others at work. It was determined through the self-concept measurement.

2. *Education counselor (advisor)*: counselor or educator employed by the Ministry of Education to provide academic, personal, social guidance to all students through the school counseling system. This way, students can achieve greater adjustment inside and outside school settings. (Al-Ajez: 2001: 4)

Research methodology and procedures:

This descriptive research aimed to identify the vocational self-concept of the education counselors in the public schools in northern areas of Palestine.

Research sample and population

The researched sample consisted of 150 counselors from the public schools in the northern areas in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015 i.e. 50% of the original population (300 counselors). The researcher used simple random sampling method to choose the study population.

Table 1: study sample characteristics

| variable | level | No | % | Variable | level | No | % |
|------------|-------------|-----|------|-----------------|-------|-----|------|
| gender | Male | 82 | 54.7 | Qualifications | BA | 123 | 82.0 |
| | Female | 68 | 45.3 | | MA + | 27 | 18.0 |
| | Total | 150 | %100 | | Total | 150 | %100 |
| Discipline | Psychology | 61 | 40.7 | Work experience | 1-5 | 37 | 24.7 |
| | Sociology | 33 | 22.0 | | 6-10 | 33 | 22.0 |
| | Social Work | 38 | 25.3 | | 11-15 | 43 | 28.7 |
| | Counseling | 18 | 12.0 | | 16+ | 37 | 24.7 |
| | Total | 150 | %100 | | Total | 150 | %100 |

Research instrument

The researcher purposefully designed a research instrument to identify the education counselors' vocational self-concept. He investigated the previous educational literature and studies related to the subject of the study such as Al-Shurafa (2011). The study tool consisted of two parts. The first section contained raw data about the participants concerning gender, discipline, qualifications and work experience. The second section included the 60-item questionnaire, which was divided into five domains: knowledge, professional performance, personality traits, psychological traits, and others.

Validity and internal reliability

The validity and internal consistency of this research instrument (questionnaire) was assessed by six competent arbitrators who lectured at the faculties of education in the Palestinian universities. The researcher omitted or modified some items in the questionnaire, which initially consisted of 67 items, and then seven of them were removed. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 60 items, following the agreement of more than 70% of the arbitrators. The Cronbach Alpha was used to calculate the reliability coefficient. (Table 2)

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

| No | Domain | item | Cronbach's |
|----|--------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | Cognitive dimension | 8 | 0.79 |
| 2 | Professional performance | 15 | 0.87 |
| 3 | Personality traits | 14 | 0.91 |
| 4 | Psychology | 13 | 0.72 |
| 5 | Appreciation of others | 10 | 0.77 |
| | Total | 60 | 0.93 |

Table 2 showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the vocational self-concept ranged between (0.79) and (0.93). The reliability coefficient of the total score was (0.91), which was a high value.

The statistical processing:

The researcher used the descriptive, statistical and analytical methodology. The descriptive statistical methods included the arithmetic averages, percentages and recurrence of the variables. The statistical analytical methods included the T-test and one-way ANOVA.

The results analysis:

The aim of this research was to identify the vocational self-concept in terms of variables of gender, discipline, qualifications, and work experience. The collected data were processed statistically using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The research results:

The statistical analysis revealed the following results:

First: Results related to the first question:

What is the level of vocational self-concept among the public school education counselors in northern governorates of Palestine?

To answer this question, the mean averages and percentages were calculated for each item and variable along with the total score of the questionnaire (Table 3).

To elaborate these findings, the vocational self-concept among the public school educational counselors in northern governorates was defined. The five score rating scale was used for measurement (1-5 = 4); the domain was then divided on the number of the group to determine length of the group ($4/5 = 0.80$); thus, the first group was ($1 + 0.80 = 1.80$); (0.80) was then added to each group as follows (Abu Dalal, 2010):

1. The average means (1 - 1.80) and the percentage (less than %36) showed a very low score.
2. The average means (1.81 - 2.60) and the percentage (%36.1 - %52) showed a low score.
3. The average means (2.61 - 3.40) and the percentage (%52.1 - %68) showed a moderate score.
4. The average means (3.41 - 4.20) and the percentage (68.1- %84) showed a high score.
5. The average means (4.21 - 5) and the percentage (more than %84) showed a high score.

First: knowledge**Table 3: knowledge average means, percentages and scores**

| Serial number | Number of item | Item/group | avg. | % | score |
|---------------|----------------|--|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1 | 8 | I understand students' personalities, needs and developmental characteristics. | 4.61 | 92.13 | Very high |
| 2 | 7 | I understand others' feelings, values and attitudes. | 4.60 | 92.00 | Very high |
| 3 | 1 | I work in a counseling because it fits my specialization. | 4.53 | 90.67 | Very high |
| 4 | 2 | I'm interested in educational counseling latest updates. | 4.37 | 87.47 | Very high |
| 5 | 3 | I am keen to attend counseling-related conferences. | 4.26 | 85.20 | Very high |
| 6 | 5 | I have effective cognitive strategies related to improving students' academic achievement. | 4.23 | 84.67 | Very high |
| 7 | 4 | I have experience in current trends in practice of school counseling and applications. | 3.97 | 79.33 | high |
| 8 | 6 | I have adequate database to achieve professional guidance and counseling purposes. | 3.96 | 79.20 | high |
| | | Total score | 4.31 | 86.32 | Very high |

Table 3 showed that the score was very high in items (8, 7, 1, 3, and 4). The percentage of the responses was 84% in the items regarding understanding students' feeling and others' personalities, reading educational counseling recent updates, congruence between counseling and discipline, and having effective counseling strategies. The researcher believed that this was due to the development of vocational school counseling discipline, which focused on adequate cognitive strategies necessary for education advisors. The score was average for the items 7 and 8. The percentage of the responses ranged between 68.1%-84% for the items regarding having adequate experience in current trends in practice of school counseling and applications as well as adequate database to achieve professional guidance and counseling purposes. The researcher believed that this was due to the information databases that were available for school counselors. Total score was very high (%86.32). The researcher attributed this to the education counselors' satisfactory perceptive proficiencies which ensued from highly professional training courses, aimed at reinforcing their various capacities. However, the results of this paper contradicted with the study of Al-Shurafa (2011).

Second: professional performance**Table 4: professional performance average means, percentages and scores**

| Serial number | Number of item | Item/group | avg. | % | score |
|---------------|----------------|---|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1 | 11 | I communicate effectively with students on human and professional levels | 4.61 | 92.13 | Very high |
| 2 | 20 | I offer psychological support for students with special needs. | 4.54 | 90.80 | Very high |
| 3 | 19 | I prepare quarterly and monthly working plan as required. | 4.53 | 90.67 | Very high |
| 4 | 10 | I organize competent collective counselling sessions to achieve the targeted objectives. | 4.46 | 89.20 | Very high |
| 5 | 21 | I possess strategic meetings management with teachers, students and parents. | 4.42 | 88.40 | Very high |
| 6 | 14 | I support the guided person to developing alternatives to decision-making and problem solving approaches. | 4.41 | 88.13 | Very high |
| 7 | 23 | I have documentation and filing system of relevant activities. | 4.37 | 87.33 | Very high |
| 8 | 9 | I employ guidance interview techniques in individual counseling sessions. | 4.36 | 87.20 | Very high |
| 9 | 13 | I have the ability to develop students' awareness and personalities through individual and group counseling sessions. | 4.35 | 87.07 | Very high |
| 10 | 22 | I always attend cluster-group meetings to exchange vocational experiences in terms of educational counseling. | 4.29 | 85.73 | Very high |
| 11 | 15 | I use evaluation results to develop future counseling programs that commensurate with the students' ages. | 4.26 | 85.20 | Very high |
| 12 | 17 | I can terminate the counseling relationship professionally and in timely manner. | 4.25 | 84.93 | Very high |
| 13 | 16 | I use the computer in my administrative and technical work. | 3.95 | 78.93 | high |
| 14 | 12 | I form counseling groups based on clear, specific criteria. | 3.93 | 78.53 | high |
| 15 | 18 | I use various individual and collective counselling scales and tests. | 4.27 | 85.4 | high |
| | | Total score | 4.31 | 86.32 | Very high |

Table (4) shows that the score was very high for the items (20, 19, 10, 3, 21, 14, 23, 9, 13, 22, 15, and 17). The percentage of the responses was more than 84% in the items regarding communication with students on human and professional levels, providing students with emotional support, preparing quarterly and monthly working plans, organizing collective counselling sessions, having meetings management and documentation skills, development of students' awareness, development of future counseling programs, and ending counseling relationship in a professional manner. The researcher believed that this was due to the development of vocational school counseling program, which focused on the counselors' adequate cognitive strategies as well as professional counseling skills training. The results of this study contradicted with Goodnough *et al* (2001). The score was high for the items (16, 12 and 18). The percentage of the responses ranged between 68.1%-84% for the items regarding using computers in administrative and technical work, forming counseling groups, and using various individual and collective counselling scales. The researcher believed that this was due to the development of professional work models and the application of intelligence and personality assessments to support specific aspects in these models. The total score was very high (%85.4), which was attributed to several factors such as ongoing career development and rehabilitation, enrolment of many counselors in Diploma and MA certificates in vocational counselling programs, and relevant meetings and courses. The findings of this research agreed with Kocarek's study (2000).

Third: personality traits**Table (5) personality traits average means, percentages and scores**

| Serial number | Number of item | Item/group | avg. | % | score |
|---------------|----------------|--|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1 | 25 | I collaborate and work with others as a team. | 4.67 | 93.33 | Very high |
| 2 | 24 | I wear decent outfits that fit with my career. | 4.61 | 92.13 | Very high |
| 3 | 36 | I am patient and clam person, and I receive constructive criticism. | 4.59 | 91.73 | Very high |
| 4 | 31 | I play a role model to set good example among my students. | 4.59 | 91.73 | Very high |
| 5 | 26 | I enjoy a sense of humor and courtesy. | 4.57 | 91.47 | Very high |
| 6 | 35 | I take responsibility and I provide assistance as fast as I can. | 4.51 | 90.13 | Very high |
| 7 | 27 | I don't mix between professional and personal issues. | 4.51 | 90.13 | Very high |
| 8 | 34 | I am vigilant, energetic and active. | 4.43 | 88.53 | Very high |
| 9 | 29 | I have leadership skills and ability of others' and self-management. | 4.40 | 88.00 | Very high |
| 10 | 28 | I am able to work under pressure and in difficult conditions. | 4.39 | 87.87 | Very high |
| 11 | 32 | I respond to sudden, unexpected events with readiness | 4.38 | 87.60 | Very high |
| 12 | 33 | I tactfully withdraw from embarrassing situations that interfere with my career. | 4.33 | 86.53 | Very high |
| 13 | 37 | I have the ability to bring about positive changes in my workplace. | 4.28 | 85.60 | Very high |
| 14 | 30 | I offer concessions in favor of work, and to avoid problems. | 4.18 | 83.60 | high |
| | | Total score | 4.46 | 89.2 | Very high |

Table (5) shows that the score was very high for the items (25, 24, 36, 31, 26, 27, 34, 29, 28, 32, 33, and 37). The percentage of the responses was more than 84% in the items regarding collaboration with others, professional appearance, characteristics of patience, sense of humor, responsibility, leadership skills, and the ability to create changes. The researcher believed that this high score was due to the nature of education counsellor's profession which drove him to reinforce his personality traits during his daily interaction with parents, teachers and local community organizations. Likewise, score was high for number (30) which received percentage of 89.2 in terms of tolerance and making concessions to avoid problems. The researcher believed that this was due to the counsellor's ability to deal with problems in a professional manner. The total score was thus very high (%85.4), which was attributed to counsellor's personality traits that well-matched his career and its different circumstances.

Fourth: mental dimension**Table (6) mental dimension average means, percentages and scores**

| Serial number | Number of item | Item/group | avg. | % | score |
|---------------|----------------|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | 43 | I feel proud when I help students and manage to generate positive changes in their lives. | 4.63 | 92.67 | Very high |
| 2 | 39 | I understand myself and accept the reality. | 4.42 | 88.40 | Very high |
| 3 | 44 | I envisage my personality traits and accept them. | 4.41 | 88.13 | Very high |
| 4 | 45 | I express my feelings clearly and frankly. | 4.40 | 88.00 | Very high |
| 5 | 41 | I control my emotional state in different situations. | 4.31 | 86.13 | Very high |
| 6 | 42 | I am accustomed to my counseling profession. | 4.29 | 85.73 | Very high |
| 7 | 40 | I feel that my job is consistent with predispositions. | 4.25 | 84.93 | Very high |
| 8 | 46 | I have job satisfaction in my counseling career. | 4.21 | 84.13 | Very high |
| 9 | 50 | I deeply believe in my occupation in educational counseling. | 4.21 | 84.13 | Very high |
| 10 | 47 | I efficiently cope with pressure and obstacles at work. | 4.19 | 83.87 | high |
| 11 | 38 | I feel psychologically secured at work. | 4.06 | 81.21 | high |
| 12 | 49 | I seize every opportunity to change my career. | 2.45 | 48.93 | low |
| 13 | 48 | I have a sense of estrangement at work. | 2.07 | 41.33 | low |
| | | Total score | 3.99 | 79.84 | high |

Table (6) showed that the score was very high for the items (43, 39, 44, 45, 41, 42, 40, 46, 50, 47 and 38). The percentage of the responses was more than 84% in the items regarding celebrating occupational success, acceptance of self, envisaging strengths and weaknesses, identifying and controlling emotions, harmony between job and predispositions, and ingenuous interest in educational counseling. The researcher believed that this high score was due to the education counsellors selection method that focused on certain characteristics, especially intellectual aspects. However, the score was low for items 48 and 49, which received percentages ranged between 36.1-52, concerning the issues of seizing opportunities to change career and having a sense of estrangement at work. The researcher believed that this low rate was due to the integration of the counsellor's role within school settings which enhanced his self-confidence in counseling. The results of this study conflicted with Abu Al-Nasr (1999). The total score was very high (%79.84), which was attributed to the large number of mental health programs aiming at counsellors' stress relief and positive orientation.

Fifth: appreciation by others

Table (7) appreciation by others average means, percentages and scores

| Serial number | Number of item | Item/group | avg. | % | score |
|--------------------|----------------|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | 57 | I feel that I am an active member in my school and that my counseling services are indispensable. | 4.19 | 83.87 | high |
| 2 | 51 | I receive appropriate moral support from my headmaster. | 4.17 | 83.33 | high |
| 3 | 53 | The teachers collaborate to solve problems/adaptive challenges faced by students during their developmental stages. | 4.11 | 82.27 | high |
| 4 | 55 | Everybody at school believes that counseling succeeds only through collaboration between counselors, staff and local community. | 4.10 | 82.00 | high |
| 5 | 52 | The headmaster participates in decision-making process concerning students' educational achievement. | 4.05 | 81.07 | high |
| 6 | 56 | The headmaster examines my records as part of his administrative duties and provides me with feedback. | 3.96 | 79.20 | high |
| 7 | 54 | The teachers consult me about personal issues. | 3.88 | 77.60 | high |
| 8 | 59 | The parents often attend the meetings that I hold regularly to follow up their children's problems related to family aspects. | 3.47 | 69.33 | high |
| 9 | 58 | I participate with school administration in the process of students' rating and distribution according to the academic plan. | 3.46 | 69.20 | high |
| 10 | 60 | I feel that teachers have higher status than me. | 2.99 | 59.87 | average |
| Total score | | | 3.83 | 76.76 | high |

Table (7) showed that the score was very high for the items (57, 51, 53, 55, 52, 56, 54, 59 and 58). The responses' percentage ranged between %68.1-%84 for the items regarding playing active role in school setting, receiving moral support from school principal, participating with other teachers in solving students' problems, believing in counselling significance, headmaster's participation in decision-making process concerning students' achievement, headmaster's follow-up of counselor's files, teachers' consultation about personal issues, parents' attendance of the counselor's meetings, and participation of school administration in students' rating and distribution. The researcher believed that this high score was due to the understanding of school staff, headmaster and local community of the counselor's role, which created vocational interrelation among all parties and developed his personality traits. However, item number 60, concerning the counselor's perspective that the teacher had a higher status, scored only %59.87. The researcher believed that this low rate was due to the counselor's conviction of his role's significance and inclusiveness. The total score was very high (%79.84), which was attributed to the common interest in the counselling work among local community and school staff, which led to the development of the counselor's personal capacities. The results of this study agreed with the study of Nichter *et al* (2007).

Table (8) vocational self-concept average means, percentages and scores

| rank | Number | Domain | average | percentage | score |
|--------------------|--------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | 2 | knowledge dimension | 4.31 | 86.32 | Very high |
| 2 | 3 | Professional performance | 4.27 | 85.4 | Very high |
| 3 | 1 | Personality traits | 4.46 | 89.2 | Very high |
| 4 | 4 | Mental dimension | 3.99 | 79.84 | high |
| 5 | 5 | Personality appreciation | 3.83 | 76.76 | high |
| Total score | | | 4.17 | 83.44 | high |

Table (8) showed that the score of vocational self-concept was very high in terms of knowledge, professional performance and personality traits, whereas it was high in terms of mentality and self-esteem. The scores were as follows: personality traits were first (%89.2), cognitive dimension was second (%86.32), professional performance was third (%85.4), mentality was fourth (%79.84), and self-esteem was fifth (%76.76); the total score was sixth (%83.44). The researcher attributed these results to increased consideration of educational counselling due to the circumstances incurred by the Palestinians, greater interest in international developments in educational counselling, and a national desire to develop the education counselors' capacities. The results of this study contradicted with the study of Al-Shurafa (2011).

The study hypothesis:

There are no significant differences at the level of (.05 (\leq) in the average means of the counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variables of gender, discipline, qualification and work experience.

Results related to the variable of gender:

To test this hypothesis, an independent (unpaired) samples t-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the level of counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of gender (table 9).

Table (9): results of independent samples t-test of job stress by gender

| domain | gender | Number | average | SD | degrees of freedom | t-value | significance |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|---------|------|--------------------|---------|--------------|
| Knowledge | male | 82 | 4.33 | 0.48 | 148 | 0.44 | 0.00 |
| | female | 68 | 4.29 | 0.33 | | | |
| Professional performance | male | 82 | 4.25 | 0.44 | 148 | 0.65 | 0.90 |
| | female | 68 | 4.30 | 0.40 | | | |
| Personality traits | male | 82 | 4.43 | 0.45 | 148 | 0.82 | 0.04 |
| | female | 68 | 4.48 | 0.36 | | | |
| Mentality | male | 82 | 3.93 | 0.39 | 148 | 1.85 | 0.58 |
| | female | 68 | 4.05 | 0.34 | | | |
| Appreciation of others | male | 82 | 3.78 | 0.61 | 148 | 1.41 | 0.06 |
| | female | 68 | 3.90 | 0.40 | | | |
| Total score | male | 82 | 4.14 | 0.38 | 148 | 1.10 | 0.03 |
| | female | 68 | 4.20 | 0.27 | | | |

* Statistically significant at the level of ($\alpha = 0.05$)

Table (9) showed that there were significant differences in the counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of gender in terms of knowledge, personality traits, and total score in favour of males; they differences were 0.00, 0.04, and 0.03 respectively, which were below the significance level of ($\alpha = 0.05$). The researcher proposed that this result was attributed to the nature of the community that provided males with greater access than females to gain additional experiences. On the other hand, there were significant differences in mentality, professional performance and

appreciation of others. These findings were consistent with Ibrahim (2005), whereas they were not consistent with Gillespie and Hillman (1993).

Results related to the variable of specialization:

To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether there were significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the level of counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of specialization (table 10).

Table (10): results of one-way ANOVA by specialization

| | Source | SS | DF | MS | F-value | P- value |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------|-----|------|---------|----------|
| Knowledge | Between groups | 1.44 | 3 | 0.48 | 2.79 | 0.06 |
| | Within groups | 25.22 | 146 | 11.8 | | |
| | Total | 26.67 | 149 | | | |
| Professional performance | Between groups | 0.56 | 3 | 0.18 | 1.02 | 0.38 |
| | Within groups | 26.88 | 146 | 0.18 | | |
| | Total | 27.44 | 149 | | | |
| Personality traits | Between groups | 0.62 | 3 | 0.20 | 1.20 | 0.31 |
| | Within groups | 25.08 | 146 | 0.17 | | |
| | Total | 25.70 | 149 | | | |
| Mentality | Between groups | 0.77 | 3 | 0.25 | 1.84 | 0.14 |
| | Within groups | 20.40 | 146 | 0.14 | | |
| | Total | 21.17 | 149 | | | |
| Appreciation of others | Between groups | 0.29 | 3 | 0.10 | 0.35 | 0.78 |
| | Within groups | 41.55 | 146 | 0.28 | | |
| | Total | 41.85 | 149 | | | |
| Total score | Between groups | 0.61 | 3 | 0.20 | 1.80 | 0.14 |
| | Within groups | 16.62 | 146 | 0.11 | | |
| | Total | 17.24 | 149 | | | |

Most of the educational counselors were employed in jobs that closely matched their credentials as educational therapists. The discipline of educational counselling was only available for postgraduates degrees (MA); thus, all educational counselors were subjected to the same qualification after their appointment. These findings contradicted with Al-Sharaf (2011) and Kelly (1993).

Results related to the variable of specialization:

To test this hypothesis, an independent (unpaired) samples t-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the level of counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of qualification (table 11).

Table (10): results of independent samples t-test by qualification

| | gender | No | Avg | SD | DF | F-value | P- value |
|--------------------------|--------|-----|------|------|-----|---------|----------|
| Knowledge | BA | 123 | 4.21 | 0.38 | 148 | 1.34 | 0.01 |
| | MA + | 27 | 4.33 | 0.55 | | | |
| Professional performance | BA | 123 | 4.18 | 0.42 | 148 | 1.24 | 0.58 |
| | MA + | 27 | 4.29 | 0.45 | | | |
| Personality traits | BA | 123 | 4.39 | 0.41 | 148 | 0.92 | 0.17 |
| | MA + | 27 | 4.47 | 0.43 | | | |
| Mentality | BA | 123 | 3.97 | 0.38 | 148 | 0.52 | 0.39 |
| | MA + | 27 | 3.99 | 0.32 | | | |
| Appreciation of others | BA | 123 | 3.69 | 0.47 | 148 | 1.54 | 0.03 |
| | MA + | 27 | 3.86 | 0.73 | | | |
| Total score | BA | 123 | 4.09 | 0.31 | 148 | 1.41 | 0.32 |
| | MA + | 27 | 4.19 | 0.42 | | | |

Table (11) showed that there were significant differences in the counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of qualification in terms of knowledge and appreciation of others in favour of the master degrees and above; they differences were (0.01 and 0.03) respectively, which were below the significance level of ($\alpha = 0.05$). The researcher

proposed that this result was attributed to the fact that higher education levels led to greater levels of knowledge and appreciation by others. On the other hand, there were no significant differences in the aspects of professional performance, personality attributes, mentality and total score. These findings were consistent with Al-Shurafa (1993).

Results related to the variable of work experience:

To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether there were significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the level of counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of work experience (table 12).

Table (10): results of one-way ANOVA by work experience

| | Source | SS | DF | MS | F-value | P- value |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------|-----|------|---------|----------|
| Knowledge | Between groups | 0.06 | 3 | 0.02 | 2.11 | 0.95 |
| | Within groups | 26.61 | 146 | 0.18 | | |
| | Total | 26.67 | 149 | | | |
| Professional performance | Between groups | 0.16 | 3 | 0.05 | 0.29 | 0.82 |
| | Within groups | 27.28 | 146 | 0.18 | | |
| | Total | 27.44 | 149 | | | |
| Personality traits | Between groups | 0.18 | 3 | 0.06 | 0.34 | 0.79 |
| | Within groups | 25.52 | 146 | 0.17 | | |
| | Total | 25.70 | 149 | | | |
| mentality | Between groups | 0.58 | 3 | 0.19 | 1.38 | 0.25 |
| | Within groups | 20.59 | 146 | 0.14 | | |
| | Total | 21.17 | 149 | | | |
| Appreciation of others | Between groups | 0.92 | 3 | 0.30 | 1.09 | 0.35 |
| | Within groups | 40.93 | 146 | 0.28 | | |
| | Total | 41.85 | 149 | | | |
| Total score | Between groups | 0.00 | 3 | 0.03 | 0.23 | 0.99 |
| | Within groups | 17.23 | 146 | 0.11 | | |
| | Total | 17.24 | 149 | | | |

Table (12) showed that there were no significant differences in the counselor's vocational self-concept due to the variable of work experience in terms of the total score and the rest dimensions. They were (0.95, 0.82, 0.79, 0.25, 0.35, and 0.99) respectively, which were higher than the significance level of ($\alpha = 0.05$). All school counselors underwent the same rehabilitation and further development despite their work experience. These findings were consistent with the study of Abdul-Jawad (1993).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the theoretical framework and previous studies, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Clear, specific, and measurable strategic criteria for educational counselling should be developed in a way that addresses the mental needs of the education counselors.
2. Education counselor's role should be developed in line with the roles of other employees within school.
3. Education counselor's recruitment and employment standards should be developed and enhanced.
4. Undergraduate (Bachelors) degree program in professional counselling should be introduced at the Palestinian universities.
5. The female education counselor's knowledge capacities and personality traits should be developed and reinforced.
6. Educational counselling philosophy should be disseminated in cooperation with the media and the local community.
7. Collaboration and communication among counselors should be supported and promoted.
8. Development and training courses should be chosen in line with counselors' needs based on research.
9. The number of organized seminars and lectures should be increased to discuss new changes in the counselling process.
10. Further research should be conducted to detect the strengths, weaknesses and adequacies in the counselling profession.

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