

Strengthening Student Discipline Through Bi-Weekly Moral Counseling Sessions: A Case Study of Kabasanda Technical Institute

Kikomeko Joseph¹ & Dr. Muweesi Charles²

¹ Muteesa I Royal University, Uganda

² Busitema University, Uganda

Correspondence: Kikomeko Joseph, Muteesa I Royal University, Uganda.

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Abstract

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector constitutes a foundational element of Uganda's middle-class development strategy. However, the sector is currently contending with a pervasive crisis of student indiscipline, which poses a significant threat to its long-term viability. In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted educational routines and exacerbated psychosocial stressors, institutions like Kabasanda Technical Institute have documented an escalation in vandalism, substance abuse, and aggression. Historically, Ugandan schools relied on corporal punishment, but the 1997 ban and the subsequent 2016 Children's Act rendered punitive measures illegal. This legislative action consequently created a lacuna that numerous TVET institutions endeavor to address by implementing effective, non-punitive alternatives. This study investigates the efficacy of a structured intervention: bi-weekly moral counseling sessions. Transcending the conventional, reactive 'fire-fighting' approach to discipline, this inquiry explores the precise mechanisms through which consistent, scheduled moral dialogue may influence student behavior. Grounded in Restorative Justice Theory and recent developments in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), a framework for cultivating emotional intelligence and interpersonal competencies, the study employs a qualitative case study design. Through in-depth interviews with 15 administrators and counselors, focus group discussions with 30 students, and a three-year documentary analysis of discipline records, the study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention. Findings reveal that the post-COVID landscape at Kabasanda was characterized by a "discipline deficit," fueled by economic hardship and a lack of positive role models. The introduction of bi-weekly counseling sessions resulted in a 73% reduction in disciplinary incidents over one academic year. The study suggests that frequency and consistency may represent critical variables in the attainment of counseling success; conversely, sporadic interventions tend to prove ineffectual, whereas a structured rhythm of moral engagement appears to foster self-regulation. The article subsequently recommends the formal institutionalization of guidance departments; furthermore, it advocates a paradigm shift from a punitive framework to a restorative model, alongside increased funding for psychosocial support within TVET institutions across the Global South.

Keywords: student discipline, moral counseling, TVET, restorative justice, post-COVID behavior, Kabasanda technical institute, behavior modification

1. Introduction and Background of the Study

The management of student behavior is a cornerstone of effective educational delivery, acting as the bedrock upon which teaching and learning occur. Globally, the philosophy of school discipline has undergone a profound paradigm shift over the last three decades. Historically, educational systems relied heavily on punitive measures, such as corporal punishment and suspension, to enforce compliance. This behaviorist approach operated on the premise that negative reinforcement would deter misbehavior. However, the recognition of children's rights, bolstered by international conventions like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), has spurred a movement towards more humanistic, psychological, and restorative approaches.

In Africa, this transition is particularly complex as it navigates the tension between traditional authoritarian upbringing, where elders are never questioned, and modern democratic educational values. The discipline discourse has moved from "command and control" to "guide and counsel," acknowledging that sustainable discipline must be internalized rather than merely enforced through fear. As noted by UNESCO (2022), the global narrative is shifting from "school discipline" to "school climate," recognizing that a safe, supportive environment is a prerequisite for academic success.

In Uganda, the legal landscape changed dramatically with the ban on corporal punishment in 1997 and the subsequent enactment of the Children's Act (Cap 59). While this legislation was a progressive step toward protecting students from physical abuse, it inadvertently created a disciplinary vacuum in many institutions. Teachers and administrators, who had relied on the cane as a primary management tool for decades, suddenly found themselves without effective alternatives. Many were untrained in alternative conflict resolution strategies, leading to frustration and inconsistent policy application.

This issue is currently exacerbated by the post-COVID-19 educational landscape. Following the prolonged lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, schools have reported a surge in what researchers call "moral regression." A recent ("The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update The World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, FSDO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022, 77 p., Open

Access," 2022) report on the state of global learning highlights that the trauma of the pandemic, economic instability at home, isolation, and grief, manifested in schools as heightened anxiety, reduced impulse control, and increased aggression. Students are returning to classrooms with eroded social skills and a diminished respect for authority.

In Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes, the situation is unique. These institutions host young adults (18–25 years old) who enjoy significantly greater autonomy than their counterparts in secondary schools. The "freedom gap", a phenomenon described by Bennell (2020), occurs when students transition from the rigid structure of secondary school to the loose environment of a technical institute. Without the internal self-regulation to handle this freedom, many deviate. Current data indicate a rise in vandalism, drug abuse, and strikes in TVET centers, threatening the quality of training and the safety of the learning environment.

This study is critically important because it addresses a crisis that threatens the very integrity of the TVET sector. TVET institutions are tasked with molding the future workforce of the nation; a workforce that requires not only technical skills but also the discipline, punctuality, and ethical grounding required by employers. If indiscipline is left unchecked, it compromises the quality of training, leads to the destruction of expensive training equipment, and tarnishes the reputation of these institutions.

Furthermore, the study is important because it moves the conversation from "crisis" to "solution." While many studies lament the state of discipline, few offer a rigorous, evidence-based intervention that has been tested on the ground. By investigating a specific intervention, bi-weekly moral counseling, this study provides a roadmap for reclaiming the learning environment. It contributes to the national goal of producing a holistically trained and employable graduate, aligning with the Ministry of Education's strategic objectives for the TVET sector.

1.1 Problem Statement

Student indiscipline continues to pose a serious challenge across many Ugandan educational institutions. Researchers have long identified its main roots in factors such as peer pressure, drug and substance abuse, poor understanding of

school rules and regulations, inadequate career guidance and counseling, weak family support systems, and ineffective school leadership. For instance, Kabakyenga & Ahumuza (2023) found that inadequate career guidance programs, students' failure to understand rules, and drug abuse ranked among the top contributors to indiscipline in secondary schools in Mbarara City. Similar patterns emerge in other recent studies, which also highlight family-related hardships, limited parental involvement, and curriculum disconnects as significant drivers of unruly behaviour among adolescents (Hassan, 2021; Odama, 2023).

The Government of Uganda banned corporal punishment in schools through the 2016 amendment to the Children Act (Section 25), with the intention of promoting positive, rights-based approaches to discipline. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and the practice still occurs in many institutions despite the legal prohibition (Karyeija et al., 2021; Parkes et al., 2025). This policy shift has created a vacuum in traditional deterrent methods without sufficiently strong alternatives in place. The situation worsened after the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused some of the longest school closures globally in Uganda. These prolonged disruptions led to learning losses, increased anxiety, disengagement, exposure to negative influences at home, and a noticeable rise in aggression, absenteeism, and behavioural challenges when learners returned to school (Aniku, 2022; Ssentumbwe, 2024). Recent qualitative analyses confirm that post-COVID discipline challenges in Ugandan secondary schools now include heightened restlessness and difficulty readjusting to structured routines (Mwebaza et al., 2025).

At Kabasanda Technical Institute, a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institution, these broader national and global trends appear in an especially acute form. Even though the institute maintains a guidance department and adheres to the official ban on corporal punishment, serious disciplinary cases averaged around 15 per month before the recent intervention. These incidents went beyond minor infractions and included violent fights, deliberate destruction of institute property, chronic absenteeism, and behaviours closely linked to drug abuse. The existing approaches, mainly sporadic reactive counselling and occasional sanctions—have not delivered lasting

improvements. Administrators and staff often feel caught between the legacy of strict traditional methods (now largely illegal) and a softer approach that currently lacks the structure and consistency needed to maintain order. This tension has created a strained academic environment that undermines teaching, learning, and the institute's core goal of preparing students for skilled employment. TVET settings face additional pressures because students tend to be older, more independent, and focused on practical training that requires high levels of focus, teamwork, and self-discipline.

Past studies have made important contributions by showing that well-organised guidance and counselling services can help reduce indiscipline, particularly in secondary schools. Research conducted in districts such as Mitooma, Nwoya, and Ntungamo has demonstrated positive links between counselling interventions and improved student behaviour when services are adequately resourced (Kesui, 2022; Ndaregwa, 2024). However, most of this literature treats counselling as a general or crisis-driven activity rather than a regular, preventive programme embedded in institutional routines. Very few studies have examined TVET institutions specifically, where students' age, employability pressures, and hands-on training demands create unique behavioural dynamics. Even fewer have investigated the practical mechanics of implementation—such as how session frequency, structure, and consistency influence outcomes. A key unanswered question is whether high-frequency, scheduled sessions (for example, bi-weekly moral and life-skills discussions) can generate the steady behavioural influence once associated with corporal punishment. This “dose-response” aspect of counselling remains largely unexplored in the Ugandan TVET context (Munyasya, 2023; Ondima, n.d.; Munyasya, 2023).

This research must therefore be conducted to fill these critical gaps and move educational practice beyond general recommendations toward tested, practical solutions. Without clear evidence on what works in real TVET settings, institutions like Kabasanda Technical Institute, and many others across Uganda, will continue relying on reactive or under-resourced methods, leading to repeated disruptions in learning, safety concerns, and poorer preparation of young people for the workforce. By rigorously evaluating the impact of consistent bi-weekly structured moral

counselling at Kabasanda Technical Institute, the study will test whether regular dialogue can effectively build moral reasoning, self-control, and responsibility. The findings are expected to provide a replicable model that other technical institutes and secondary schools can adapt to their contexts. In the post-ban and post-pandemic era, such evidence is urgently needed to guide policy development, strengthen guidance departments, support teacher training, and promote sustainable positive discipline practices that respect students' rights while restoring a calm and productive learning atmosphere. Ultimately, stronger, evidence-based discipline systems will help create safer schools and give students a better foundation for academic success and productive careers.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of structured bi-weekly moral counseling sessions on the behavioral conduct of students at Kabasanda Technical Institute.

1.3 Research Objectives

- 1) To elucidate the nature and underlying causes of student indiscipline at Kabasanda Technical Institute, preceding the implementation of moral counseling sessions.
- 2) To examine the implementation process pertaining to the bi-weekly moral counseling sessions at Kabasanda Technical Institute.
- 3) To determine the efficacy of bi-weekly moral counseling sessions in mitigating instances of indiscipline among students.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) What constitutes the nature and underlying causality of student indiscipline at Kabasanda Technical Institute?
- 2) What is the specific implementation process for the bi-weekly moral counseling sessions at Kabasanda Technical Institute?
- 3) What is the demonstrable effect of bi-weekly moral counseling sessions upon the mitigation of indiscipline instances among students?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This investigation may provide substantial value to a multiplicity of stakeholders through the extension of its contributions beyond the confines of Kabasanda Technical Institute, thereby

influencing broader educational practice, policy formulation, and societal advancement within Uganda.

- 1) For the **academic community**, the research augments the existing body of knowledge in educational psychology and behavioural management, particularly within the Global South and TVET contexts. It offers empirical evidence on how structured counselling interventions function in a Ugandan technical institute, highlighting the importance of session frequency in achieving behavioural change. By examining the "dose-response" relationship in moral counselling and its integration with restorative practices, the study may challenge one-size-fits-all approaches to discipline and provides a foundation for future research on post-pandemic student behaviour and the mechanisms of effective guidance programmes in vocational settings.
- 2) For **practitioners**, including school administrators, tutors, wardens, and counsellors, the study furnishes salient insights. It presents a tested model for implementing bi-weekly moral counselling sessions, while delineating logistical realities such as large group sizes and limited staffing. The findings demonstrate how consistent dialogue can restore relationships, reduce indiscipline, and foster self-regulation among students. For industry leaders who employ TVET graduates, the study is particularly relevant. Employers frequently observe that many graduates possess technical skills but lack essential soft skills, including discipline, emotional intelligence, accountability, and interpersonal competence. By addressing these gaps at the training stage, the intervention facilitates the development of graduates who are not only technically proficient but also reliable and adaptable in the workplace, aligning with Uganda's TVET Policy emphasis on functional and soft skills for employability.
- 3) For **policymakers**, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), are afforded evidence-based support for decision-making. The study underscores that guidance and counselling should not remain an ancillary obligation

for personnel lacking requisite training but must be recognised as a core requirement for institutional stability and student welfare. It provides justification for increased investment in fully functional counselling departments, enhanced counsellor-to-student ratios, and the integration of restorative and social-emotional approaches. Such evidence can inform future policy guidelines, accreditation standards, and resource allocation for TVET institutions across the country.

- 4) For **society at large**, the benefits extend to community stability and national development. Indiscipline in educational institutions often may manifest in communities through crime, unrest, or unproductive behaviours. By demonstrating an effective, non-punitive method for instilling moral values, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making, the study contributes to the formation of disciplined and ethically grounded young people. This supports the development of responsible citizens who can contribute positively to Uganda's workforce and society, ultimately contributing to the reconstruction of trust in technical education and promote safer, more productive communities.

1.6 Scope of the Study

For the maintenance of focus and the preservation of feasibility, the parameters of this investigation were rigorously defined, thereby necessitating a deliberate delimitation of its scope.

- 1) Geographically, the research was circumscribed to Kabasanda Technical Institute in Butambala District, Uganda. Adopting a single-site case study design facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the institution's specific culture, disciplinary processes, and the implementation of the bi-weekly counselling intervention. While the findings are context-specific, the detailed insights obtained may yield valuable insights capable of informing similar initiatives in other TVET institutions.
- 2) In terms of population, the study drew participants from the institute's approximately 1,200 students and 80 staff members. However, it specifically focused

upon individuals directly implicated in or impacted by disciplinary matters, including students (particularly repeat offenders), tutors, wardens, and members of the counselling department. This selective focus thus ensured the procurement of data characterized by relevance, meticulousness, and abundant practical perspectives.

- 3) With regard to variables, the study examined two primary sets. The independent variable was the bi-weekly moral counselling sessions, defined by their frequency, specifically occurring every two weeks; their content, encompassing moral re-orientation and life skills; and their delivery mode, predominantly involving group discussions supplemented by individual elements. The dependent variable was student discipline, operationalized through measurable indicators, including the incidence of disciplinary cases, occurrences of vandalism and property destruction, fluctuations in absenteeism rates, and perceptible alterations in student conduct and self-regulation.
- 4) Temporally, the study covered three academic years from 2021 to 2023. This timeframe, therefore, encompassed the pre-intervention period (2021), characterized by a high incidence of indiscipline; the transitional phase (2022); and the post-intervention phase (2023). This extended duration, consequently, enabled a clear comparative analysis of disciplinary trends both prior to and subsequent to the implementation of the structured counselling program.
- 5) The study acknowledged several limitations. As a single-institution case study, its findings may not be directly generalizable across all TVET institutions in Uganda, given the significant variations in institutional size, geographic location, available resources, and prevailing management paradigms. Additionally, the reliance upon self-reported data from students introduced the potential for social desirability bias, wherein participants might underreport adverse behaviors. The mitigation of potential researcher bias in the interpretation of qualitative data was achieved through the triangulation of diverse sources, including documentary

records, interviews, and observations, coupled with member checking involving participants. These delineated boundaries, consequently, ensured the focused nature of the research whilst still yielding robust and actionable insights.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Restorative Justice Theory (RJT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory.

Restorative Justice Theory: Originating in the criminal justice work of Zehr (2002) and extensively adapted for schools by researchers like Wachtel (2016) and more recently by González (2022), RJT posits that misbehavior is a violation of people and relationships, not just a violation of rules. In the traditional retributive model, the questions asked are: What rule was broken? Who broke it? What punishment do they deserve? In the Restorative Justice model, the questions are: Who was hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligation is it to meet those needs?

This theory is critical to this study because the “bi-weekly moral counseling” sessions were designed to be restorative circles, not punitive hearings. The counseling process provided the space for students to acknowledge the harm caused by their actions (e.g., vandalism) and to take steps to repair that harm (e.g., apologizing, fixing the damage). Recent applications of RJT in African schools, as documented by Skiba et al. (2014), show that when students feel accountable to their community rather than afraid of the administration, recidivism rates drop significantly.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): While Bandura’s Social Learning Theory remains relevant, recent literature has pivoted toward the specific framework of SEL, popularized by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). SEL theory posits that students must possess five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020).

This study utilizes SEL theory to explain why the counseling worked. The bi-weekly sessions were not just “talking”; they were training grounds for

self-management and responsible decision-making. A recent longitudinal study by Jones et al. (2023) demonstrated that students who receive consistent SEL instruction show improved academic performance and significantly fewer behavioral infractions. By framing the counseling as “moral instruction,” the intervention targeted the students’ deficit in social-emotional competencies.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 The Nature of Indiscipline in the Digital Age

The nature of student indiscipline has evolved. In the past, indiscipline was often noisy (fighting, shouting). Today, recent literature suggests a more complex picture involving digital influences and mental health. A 2022 study by Twenge and Campbell on “Screen Time and Social Media” links excessive social media use to increased narcissism and aggression among adolescents. At Kabasanda, this manifests as “cyber-mobility,” where students organize strikes or gang activity via smartphones, making it harder for administrators to detect.

Furthermore, the “hidden curriculum” concept first introduced by Jackson (1968) and revitalized in recent web-based educational blogs and journals (e.g., The Edvocate, 2023) suggests that students learn from what the school does, not just what it says. If a school treats students with suspicion, the hidden curriculum teaches rebellion. Recent research by Mugisha (2019) in Uganda confirms that when technical institutes use “militaristic” discipline, it breeds an underground culture of resistance.

2.2.2 Causes of Indiscipline in TVET

Literature specific to the TVET sector in East Africa points to the “identity crisis” of the technical student. A study by Oketch (2021) argues that TVET is often stigmatized as a “last resort” for students who failed to enter university. This stigmatization leads to low self-esteem, which is a primary driver of acting out. If a student feels their education has no value, they are less likely to respect the institution.

Additionally, the post-COVID economic downturn has been a major exacerbating factor. According to the report (“The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update The World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, FSDO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022, 77 p., Open Access,” 2022), many families in Uganda saw their incomes decimated during the lockdowns.

Students returned to school unable to afford basic necessities, leading to theft and survival-related crimes. The stress of poverty is a direct predictor of behavioral dysregulation (Evans & Schamberg, 2009).

2.2.3 Counseling as a Behavioral Intervention

The literature on counseling in schools has shifted from viewing it as “remedial” (fixing broken kids) to “developmental” (helping all kids grow). A 2023 meta-analysis by Whipple et al. reviewed over 50 studies on school counseling outcomes. They found that the most effective programs were those that were systemic, frequent, and proactive.

The “bi-weekly” aspect of this intervention is supported by the principle of “repetition and reinforcement.” In a 2020 article in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Smith et al. argued that “dose frequency” matters significantly in social-emotional interventions. A one-off seminar at the beginning of the term has a decay effect; students forget the lessons within weeks. However, bi-weekly interaction acts as a “booster shot,” keeping the moral concepts active in the students’ working memory.

However, implementation is key. A recent (UNESCO, 2022) report on “Guidance and Counselling in Africa” highlights that the biggest barrier is the lack of trained personnel. In many Ugandan schools, counseling is an add-on duty for a teacher who has no training in psychology. This often leads to “counseling” that is just preaching or scolding in disguise, which is counterproductive. The current study contributes to this literature by examining a case where the sessions were structured and somewhat formalized, allowing for an analysis of their efficacy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach anchored in a descriptive case study design to examine the implementation and impact of bi-weekly moral counseling at Kabasanda Technical Institute. The choice of a case study design was informed by its suitability for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly where contextual boundaries are not clearly distinguishable. As emphasized by Yin (2018), case study research is most appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand complex social

phenomena in depth within their natural setting.

In this study, student indiscipline and counseling interventions are deeply embedded within institutional, social, and environmental dynamics. Therefore, the qualitative case study design enabled the researcher to explore not only the outcomes of the intervention but also the processes, meanings, and lived experiences of both students and staff. The study focused on understanding “how” and “why” the counseling intervention influenced behavioural change, rather than merely measuring statistical outcomes.

3.2 Study Population and Sampling Strategy

The study population comprised 420 students and 56 staff members at Kabasanda Technical Institute. From this population, a carefully selected sample was drawn to ensure depth, diversity, and relevance of information.

Staff Sampling (Purposive Sampling)

A total of fifteen key informants were selected through purposive sampling. The cohort comprised the Deputy Principal, Dean of Students, three wardens, and ten tutors/counselors. The selection process was guided by their direct involvement in student discipline management, and counseling processes. These participants were deemed information-rich cases, primarily owing to their institutional memory and capacity to furnish comparative insights into disciplinary trends before and after the implementation of the counseling intervention.

Student Sampling (Stratified Purposive Sampling)

Thirty students were selected using stratified purposive sampling. Stratification was predicated upon gender (fifteen males and fifteen females) and academic level (first-year and second-year students). This methodology ensured comprehensive representation across pivotal demographic and academic categories, thereby enhancing the depth and variability of perspectives. Students were also drawn from different training programs and included selected student leaders to capture both ordinary and leadership perspectives on discipline and counseling experiences.

The determination of the sample size’s adequacy was guided by the principle of **data saturation**, wherein data collection proceeded until the emergence of novel themes ceased during the

interviews and group discussions. In qualitative research, a discernible emphasis is typically

placed upon the richness and depth of data, rather than upon statistical representativeness.

Table 1. Distribution of Study Respondents

Category of Respondents	Sampling Technique	Academic Level / Role Specification	Number of Respondents	Total
Staff Members	Purposive Sampling	Deputy Principal, Dean of Students, Wardens, Tutors/Counselors	15	15
Students (Male)	Stratified Purposive Sampling	First-year and Second-year students	15	
Students (Female)	Stratified Purposive Sampling	First-year and Second-year students	15	30
Grand Total				45

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The study employed methodological triangulation for the augmentation of credibility, validity, and the profundity of derived findings, three complementary methodologies were judiciously employed:

(a) Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 staff members using an interview guide. This allowed for both consistency across interviews and flexibility to explore emerging issues. The interviews focused on causes of indiscipline, institutional responses, implementation of counseling sessions, and observed behavioural changes. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants’ consent.

(b) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Three FGDs were conducted, each consisting of 10 students. The FGDs facilitated interactive discussion, allowing participants to build on one another’s responses and generate shared meanings regarding discipline and counseling experiences. The discussions were guided by open-ended questions such as perceptions of Friday counseling sessions, peer behavioural changes, and institutional discipline culture.

(c) Documentary Analysis

Documentary data was collected through a review of the institute’s Occurrence Books covering the period 2021 to 2023. This provided objective records of disciplinary cases, including frequency, type, and severity of offences. The documentary evidence enabled comparison of pre-intervention and post-intervention

disciplinary trends, thereby strengthening the validity of the qualitative findings.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative data was analyzed using Thematic Analysis following the framework developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This approach is widely recognized for its flexibility and rigor in identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative datasets.

The analysis followed six systematic phases:

- 1) **Familiarization with Data:** Transcribing interviews, reading transcripts repeatedly, and immersing in the data to gain an in-depth understanding.
- 2) **Generating Initial Codes:** Systematically coding meaningful segments such as “peer pressure,” “empathy development,” and “behavioral resistance.”
- 3) **Searching for Themes:** Grouping related codes into broader categories such as “drivers of indiscipline” and “restorative transformation.”
- 4) **Reviewing Themes:** Refining themes by checking coherence against coded extracts and the full dataset.
- 5) **Defining and Naming Themes:** Clearly articulating the essence of each theme and its relevance to the research objectives.
- 6) **Producing the Report:** Integrating themes with carefully selected quotations to construct a coherent analytical narrative.

To enhance rigor, the study applied trustworthiness criteria proposed by Guba & Lincoln (1989), including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to document analytical decisions, while reflexivity was practiced to minimize researcher bias.

In addition, documentary data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistical techniques to establish trends in disciplinary cases over time. These quantitative findings were then integrated with qualitative themes to produce a comprehensive and contextualized interpretation of the intervention's impact.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

- 1) Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional research committee prior to data collection. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents following a clear elucidation of the study's purpose, its procedures, and the anticipated outcomes.
- 2) Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously upheld throughout the study. Participants were assigned pseudonyms such as "Respondent R1" for the preservation of their anonymity. All data underwent secure storage and was exclusively allocated for academic purposes.
- 3) Given that a proportion of student participants constituted minors (aged seventeen years), additional ethical safeguards were implemented. The researcher ensured the prevention of harm or coercion exposure for student participants, and the conduct of discussions within a secure and non-intimidating environment was paramount for the minimization of power imbalances between students and institutional authorities.
- 4) Participants were further apprised of their prerogative to withdraw from the investigation at any juncture without incurring adverse consequences. The maintenance of stringent objectivity was additionally enacted through the bracketing of personal assumptions pertaining to the efficacy of moral counseling across the entirety of the research process.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

- 1) The present study's limitation arises from its single-site case study design, which precludes the statistical generalizability to other Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. However, the depth of contextual analysis enhances its analytical transferability to similar institutional settings.
- 2) The reliance on self-reported data potentially introduces a susceptibility to social desirability bias, where participants might have presented an overstatement of positive behavioral modifications. Nevertheless, the mitigation of this limitation occurred through triangulation with staff interviews and documentary records, which afforded corroborative evidence.
- 3) Additionally, the investigation was unable to fully account for the influence of external variables, including economic pressures, community influences, and modifications in law enforcement, which may have also contributed to alterations in disciplinary patterns. Consequently, while the findings strongly suggest an association between counseling intervention and improved discipline, the exclusive attribution of causality to the intervention remains unfeasible.

4. Findings and Interpretation

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study involved a total of 45 participants, consisting of 15 staff members and 30 students from Kabasanda Technical Institute. Among the staff, 9 were male and 6 were female. They brought substantial professional experience in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, ranging from 5 to 25 years. This depth of experience made them valuable key informants, offering well-informed perspectives on long-term discipline trends and student behaviour patterns at the institute.

The student participants included 18 males and 12 females, with ages ranging between 17 and 24 years. This gender distribution mirrors the typical enrollment patterns in technical and engineering-related programmes at the institute, where male students tend to outnumber females. Such disparities are common in TVET and STEM-related fields across many countries. UNESCO (2022) has consistently highlighted that women remain under-represented in these areas, often

making up only about 35% of STEM graduates globally, a trend that persists in vocational and technical training contexts.

By including both experienced staff and a balanced mix of students, the study captured a wide range of viewpoints. This combination helped integrate official institutional insights with the real-life experiences of the students themselves, strengthening the overall credibility of the findings.

4.2 Objective 1: Nature and Causes of Student Indiscipline

Before the introduction of bi-weekly moral counselling sessions, Kabasanda Technical Institute faced persistently high levels of student indiscipline. Documentary records from 2021 showed an average of 15 serious disciplinary cases per month. These included vandalism of workshop equipment, physical assaults between students, theft of personal items such as mobile phones, and chronic absenteeism. The pattern pointed to a deep-rooted behavioural challenge rather than occasional lapses, creating ongoing disruption to the teaching and learning environment.

These findings reflect broader post-pandemic effects observed in education systems worldwide. UNESCO (2021) documented how prolonged school closures during COVID-19 led to significant learning losses, weakened social skills, and increased aggression and disengagement among learners when schools eventually reopened. In Uganda, one of the countries with the longest closures, these disruptions contributed to readjustment difficulties and heightened behavioural issues in many institutions (Ssentumbwe, 2024; Mukasa et al., 2025).

Substance abuse emerged as a major driver of indiscipline. Both staff and students frequently mentioned alcohol and marijuana use as key triggers for disruptive behaviour. Intoxicated students were often involved in property destruction and aggression. Students themselves explained that peer pressure and the need to fit into social groups encouraged experimentation, even when it led to punishment. This aligns with global observations of youth substance use as a response to stress and uncertainty during and after the pandemic period (Layman et al., 2022; WHO, 2022). Punitive measures such as suspension often proved counterproductive, as they removed students from structured support

and returned them to the same risky environments that fuelled the behaviour.

Another notable factor was what participants described as the “freedom gap” created by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Many students reported developing a stronger sense of independence after spending extended periods at home with limited supervision. Upon returning to the institute, they found institutional rules restrictive, leading to resistance against authority and more confrontational attitudes. This phenomenon echoes wider youth development research showing that adolescents increasingly negotiate autonomy in ways that can clash with traditional school structures.

Economic hardship also played a significant role, particularly in cases of theft. Some students from disadvantaged backgrounds stole food or basic items primarily out of survival needs rather than deliberate malice. This form of “survival indiscipline” was linked to increased household poverty following the pandemic, as highlighted in post-COVID economic analyses (World Bank, 2022). In such situations, purely disciplinary sanctions proved inadequate because they failed to address the underlying unmet needs.

4.3 Objective 2: Implementation of Bi-Weekly Moral Counseling

The bi-weekly moral counselling sessions were held on alternate Fridays, deliberately scheduled toward the end of the academic week. This timing allowed students to reflect on their recent behaviour and prepare mentally for the less-supervised weekend period, which often carried higher risks of misconduct. Attendance was mandatory for repeat offenders but voluntary for the general student body.

This structured scheduling reflects established principles of behavioural intervention, where consistent timing can serve as a reflective “pause point” to support self-regulation. The approach encouraged students to consider their actions before entering higher-risk environments.

The counselling itself focused on moral re-orientation through participatory dialogue rather than lectures or punishment. Counselors used ethical questioning and real-life scenario discussions to help students develop empathy, moral reasoning, and a sense of responsibility. Instead of simply telling students what not to do, facilitators encouraged them to view situations from others’ perspectives. This method draws from restorative justice principles, which

emphasise understanding harm and repairing relationships rather than relying on fear of punishment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Lodi et al., 2021).

At the beginning, many students resisted the sessions, viewing them as an extra form of punishment. Over time, however, attitudes shifted as participants appreciated the non-judgmental space where they felt heard. This change underscores the importance of building trust and a strong therapeutic alliance in counselling work. Once students experienced genuine listening and respect, participation moved from reluctance to active engagement.

Despite these positive developments, implementation faced practical challenges. With a large student population and limited counselling staff, sessions sometimes became overcrowded, limiting opportunities for deeper individual interaction. The Dean of Students observed that large groups occasionally turned the sessions into assemblies rather than focused discussions. Such constraints are common in many African educational settings, where counsellor-to-student ratios remain stretched (UNESCO, 2021). Nevertheless, students consistently valued the predictable schedule, noting that it helped them practice self-regulation and reflection throughout the week.

4.4 Objective 3: Effect on Reduction of Indiscipline

Documentary records showed a clear and substantial decline in disciplinary cases after the bi-weekly counselling intervention began. In 2022, before full implementation, the institute recorded approximately 180 major disciplinary incidents, averaging about 15 cases per month. By 2023, after one year of consistent sessions, this dropped to 48 cases — roughly 4 per month. This represents a reduction of approximately 73% in serious incidents, indicating meaningful improvement in overall student behaviour.

The decline was both statistically noticeable and practically important, suggesting that the programme addressed root causes of misconduct rather than simply suppressing surface-level problems. Meta-analyses of school-based counselling and psychosocial interventions have similarly reported significant reductions in disciplinary referrals when programmes are structured and consistent (Durlak et al., 2022; Shen et al., 2024).

Qualitative accounts from students and staff reinforced these numbers. Many students

described developing better self-regulation, moving from quick-tempered reactions to more thoughtful responses. For example, one student shared that he had learned to walk away from potential fights instead of reacting impulsively. This kind of internal control aligns closely with the self-management competency outlined in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which stresses the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviours to achieve positive goals (Durlak et al., 2022; Mahoney et al., 2020).

Staff also observed improved relationships with students. Learners became more willing to admit mistakes voluntarily and seek guidance on making amends. This shift from denial to accountability reflects core restorative justice outcomes, where the emphasis moves toward repairing harm and rebuilding trust within the school community (Lodi et al., 2021; Alonso-Rodríguez et al., 2025).

The most striking improvement appeared in cases of vandalism. Students who participated in restorative activities — such as helping repair damaged property — gained a direct understanding of the consequences of their actions. This hands-on restitution proved more effective at discouraging repeat offences than traditional suspension, which often failed to promote lasting behavioural change.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that consistent, dialogue-based moral counselling can serve as a practical and effective alternative to previous disciplinary approaches in a TVET setting. While challenges such as staffing shortages remain, the intervention produced measurable reductions in indiscipline and noticeable improvements in student responsibility and school climate. These results offer valuable lessons for other institutions seeking sustainable ways to manage student behaviour in the post-pandemic era.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Centrality of Frequency: A “Dose-Response” Relationship

One of the study’s most important contributions is the clear evidence that the **frequency** of counselling sessions matters greatly. The bi-weekly moral counselling schedule at Kabasanda Technical Institute was not just a convenient timetable arrangement; it created a consistent rhythm that supported lasting behavioural change. In behaviour modification and social-emotional learning (SEL) research, this pattern is

often described as a **dose-response relationship**, where more regular exposure to structured support produces stronger outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Lemberger-Truelove & Darden, 2026).

At Kabasanda, the bi-weekly meetings established a continuous feedback loop. Students practised moral lessons and self-regulation skills during the week, then returned to reflect on their experiences, share successes and setbacks, and receive guidance. This iterative process helped them gradually internalise competencies such as self-management and responsible decision-making. The findings suggest that less frequent approaches — such as monthly or quarterly sessions common in many under-resourced Ugandan institutions — are often too weak to counteract the daily pressures of peer influence, substance abuse, and economic stress faced by TVET students. Regular, scheduled dialogue appears essential for building the “therapeutic rhythm” needed to replace the deterrent effect once provided by corporal punishment.

5.2 Restorative Justice in Action: Moving Beyond Retributive Approaches

The results strongly support the principles of restorative justice, which focus on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships rather than simply punishing rule-breaking (Lodi et al., 2021; Zehr, 2002). Before the intervention, discipline at the institute followed a largely retributive model: breaking a rule led to punishment, often through suspension or other sanctions that removed students from the school community. Such approaches frequently worsened behaviour by isolating students and failing to address underlying causes.

In contrast, the bi-weekly counselling sessions shifted the focus toward restoration. Students were encouraged to recognise how their actions affected others and the institute community, then to take responsibility by apologising or helping repair damage. This change led to greater willingness among students to admit mistakes and make amends. In collectivist contexts like Uganda, where community harmony and belonging are highly valued, restorative practices resonate deeply with traditional justice values such as reconciliation and Ubuntu (Sarkin, 2025). The intervention motivated change not through fear but through a desire to remain part of the “institute family,” demonstrating that restorative dialogue can be more effective than punitive measures alone in fostering accountability and

reducing repeat offences.

5.3 Addressing the Post-Pandemic Context

The study also illuminates the lingering “COVID effect” on student behaviour. The high levels of aggression, absenteeism, and substance use observed in 2021–2022 appear linked to the trauma and disruption caused by Uganda’s prolonged school closures, among the longest globally. Many students returned with heightened anxiety, weakened social skills, and a sense of lost structure, which manifested as resistance to institutional rules and increased indiscipline (Mukasa et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

The bi-weekly counselling sessions provided a safe, consistent space for students to express worries about their future, economic struggles, and readjustment difficulties. In doing so, the programme unintentionally functioned as a form of trauma-informed support. Recent guidance from UNESCO and related African studies emphasises that schools must increasingly serve as “healing centres” in the post-pandemic era by integrating social-emotional learning and psychosocial support (2023). At Kabasanda, the regular sessions helped reduce the anxiety and emotional dysregulation that had fuelled acting-out behaviours, confirming that structured counselling can play a vital role in helping learners recover from collective trauma.

5.4 The Vulnerability of Human Resources

Despite the programme’s success, a major limitation remains the strain on human resources. Large group sizes meant that sessions sometimes felt more like assemblies than intimate counselling discussions, limiting personalised attention. This reflects a widespread challenge across Ugandan and African TVET institutions, where counsellor-to-student ratios are often inadequate and guidance departments lack sufficient trained staff and funding (Joseph, 2024, 2022).

The effectiveness of the bi-weekly model currently depends heavily on the dedication of a small number of staff. If these individuals experience burnout or leave, the programme could falter. For sustainability, institutions must move beyond relying on individual goodwill. Proper institutionalization, including dedicated budgets, additional trained counsellors, and integration into policy is essential to ensure the approach can be maintained and scaled effectively.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This study evaluated the impact of bi-weekly structured moral counselling on student discipline at Kabasanda Technical Institute. The following conclusions emerge from the findings:

- **Nature of Indiscipline:** Student indiscipline at the institute appeared to originate primarily from psychosocial challenges, including substance abuse, economic hardship, diminished capacities for self-regulation, and the persistent ramifications of post-COVID disruptions, encompassing phenomena such as anxiety and a pervasive loss of structure.
- **Efficacy of the Intervention:** The introduction of consistent bi-weekly moral counselling was observed to correlate with a substantial seventy-three percent reduction in serious disciplinary cases within a twelve-month period; moreover, the program demonstrated greater efficacy than preceding reactive or punitive approaches in fostering a more serene learning environment.
- **Mechanism of Change:** The demonstrable success of the intervention was largely attributable to the consistent provision of counseling sessions, which facilitated the promotion of restorative accountability, the establishment of trust, and the internalization of socio-emotional learning (SEL) competencies—such as self-management and empathy, through sustained reflection and dialogue.
- **Implementation Challenges:** Although demonstrably efficacious, the program's sustainability appears precarious, largely owing to challenges such as oversubscribed sessions, a scarcity of adequately trained counselors, and the discernible lack of robust policy and financial endorsements at both institutional and national echelons.

6.2 Recommendations

- 1) **At the Institutional Level:** Kabasanda Technical Institute necessitates the formal embedding of the bi-weekly counselling programme within the official timetable, concomitant with a budgetary allocation for the recruitment of a minimum of two additional trained counsellors. Such provisions could purportedly facilitate a

reduction in group sizes, thereby fostering more profound individual engagement.

- 2) **At Ministry Level:** The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) necessitates the development and concomitant funding of explicit policy guidelines, thereby mandating the establishment of fully functional guidance and counselling departments within all Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, rather than permitting the relegation of counselling to an ancillary duty performed by untrained personnel.
- 3) **Training of Tutors:** A prerequisite entails the provision of foundational training in counselling and restorative practices for all tutors. Given their daily interaction with students, tutors are positioned to reinforce the moral and life-skills tenets disseminated during counselling sessions, thereby fostering a holistic, institution-wide approach to disciplinary frameworks.
- 4) **At Regulatory Level:** The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) ought to integrate the presence of adequately staffed and fully functional counselling departments as a pivotal accreditation requisite for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. Such a measure would serve to establish foundational benchmarks for student welfare and academic support.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Subsequent investigations ought to encompass longitudinal follow-up assessments to ascertain whether the behavioural ameliorations observed during the counselling programme persist post-graduation and upon entry into the workforce. Such research could potentially furnish valuable empirical data regarding the long-term impact of structured moral counselling within TVET settings, along with its potential contribution to the cultivation of responsible, employable citizens. Furthermore, comparative analyses undertaken across disparate TVET institutions might elucidate the mechanisms through which variations in session frequency, counsellor professional development, and resource availability exert influence upon programmatic outcomes.

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