

# Evaluating The School Counselors' Professional Competencies Based On The Professional Standards Of Educational Guidance And Counseling

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## Abstract:

The study aimed to reveal the level of possession and practice of the school counselor's professional competencies based on the professional standards of educational guidance and counseling from the counselors' perspective, to reveal the impact of demographic variables and to reveal the predictive ability for the counselors' possession of the professional competencies by practicing such competencies. The study population consisted of (1109) male and female counselors; the number of study individuals was (323) male and female counselors. Two scales of possession and practice of the school counselor's professional competencies created and the indices of the validity and reliability thereof verified. The results showed that the counselors possess and practice professional competencies at a high level, with a high explained variation of (45.92% and 39.26%), respectively and showed a statistically significant difference between the two means of the counselors' possession of the professional competencies dimension (growth characteristics and demands) attributed to gender in favor of females. It showed a statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the two means of practicing professional competencies and dimensions thereof (growth characteristics and demands, counseling programs and professional development) attributed to gender in favor of females. It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of possessing and practicing the professional competencies and dimensions thereof attributed to Experience, Specialty and Stage of school and a set of recommendations had concluded.

**Keywords:** School Counseling, Educational Counseling, School Counselors, Professional Competencies, Possession, Practice.

## Introduction

Societies seek to build cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally integrated generations compatible with their environment and this is one of the roles played by educational institutions. School counseling is one of the main pillars in the process of community building through the school, as it aims to assist the learner in realizing himself according to his strengths, capabilities, aptitudes and tendencies. The counseling profession is attentive to the

challenges that the school counselor deals with, which affect numerous aspects of students' life. (Al Zaabi and Hamoud, 2013).

The need for school counseling is a scientific requirement caused by the accelerated pace of life, technological progress, social change, life demands and the need for psychological stability (Al-Jaid, 2019). The student's need for guidance and counseling starts from the early grades until the university stage, as student guidance and counseling aim to provide psychological

support for students to understand themselves, know their abilities and develop their skills and be able to solve their problems to achieve psychological, social, educational and professional harmony, in a way that enhances teaching and learning processes and improves their outputs (General Administration of Student Counseling, 1442 AH).

In his work with students, the school counselor faces huge and demanding tasks. He provides group and individual counseling, preventive, developmental and remedial counseling, attention to low academic achievement, care for outstanding and talented students, planning and developing counseling programs and providing students with information about academic and professional opportunities, which are services help students to realize his psychological, social and educational growth.

The school counselor has self-skills such as personal strengths, verbal fluency intellectual flexibility, human skills related to human aspects and social relations, technical skills related to the cognitive aspects of counseling and the techniques of the counseling process and cognitive perception skills related to the holistic view of the counselor towards his work (Al-Rabdi, 2014). Thanks to the importance of the required characteristics of the school counselor, the Ministry of Education (2018) identified three characteristics of the school counselor as mentioned in the Organizational Guide for Public Education Schools in three areas: The field of knowledge, the field of skills and abilities and the field of personality traits.

To provide effective counseling services in the educational field, the duties of the counselor should be clear and specific. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2017) and the Ministry of Education (2021), determined general duties of school counselors and limited the same to the performance of individual and

collective counseling, cooperation with the school staff and performance of psychological tests if there is a need to diagnose certain cases and difficulties experienced by students and attention to low academic achievement, as well as the care of outstanding and talented persons, the planning and development of educational and professional programs for students, conducting research on students' needs and how to fulfill such needs and helping students to achieve their psychosocial, social and educational development perfectly, as well as helping them understand their strengths and weaknesses and helping parents to consult and coordinate on their children's educational, psychological and social conditions and provide data and information to students on educational and professional opportunities available at institutes and universities.

Therefore, it is necessary to provide counseling services that have an impact on the school environment; benefit the student and help him to face the obstacles facing him; enabling him to achieve psychological, social and academic harmony and those who provide these services must be a specialized counselor having a cognitive and practical ability in these aspects.

The school counselor may have the necessary scientific knowledge, but he may lack the professional competence to use this knowledge in the interest of work and despite the importance of the scientific aspect, it is not enough to achieve the impact but must possess practical and technical skill and competence (Al-Khatib, 2004), (Al-Qahtani, 2019).

The significance of researching counselors' access to professional competencies, as well as the extent of the impact of their qualification programs and their acquisition of the necessary professional competencies, has grown, as professional competencies are among the essential pillars through which personal characteristics can be identified and good

professional methods used by educators to achieve their goals effectively and efficiently (Bataynah, 2007).

Thanks to the importance of counseling services in the school, the school counselor must possess professional counseling competencies because those who have these competencies can help students solve their academic, social and psychological problems. As a result, the school counselor must have the skills and knowledge of remedial methods, counseling session management, scientific, practical and mental competence and the ability to make the appropriate decision to conduct his work successfully (Al-Juhani, 2019). The professional counseling competencies allow the school counselor to perform his work effectively and skillfully and lead to achieving satisfaction in various situations of social interaction with students (Al-Rabdi, 2014).

The significance of the specialist's competency in the counseling process originates from the school counselor's interest in the development of personal and social components in the student's life and the success of this is dependent on his personal traits and good professional competencies (Kajwan, 2013). Professional competencies are essential for the work of a school counselor and their value is equal to that of personal, scientific and administrative competencies and so on (Tawfiq, 2012).

Because the notions overlap between the school counselor's jobs and his competencies and practices, the tasks are defined linguistically as the assignment to achieve duties of defined specifications, (Anis et al., 2004), while the practices are defined linguistically as practicing a certain work and constantly getting adopted to perform it, (Shehata and Al-Najjar, 2003). The guiding practices are the set of tasks related to the work of the school counselor (Al-Huwaish, 2017). Therefore, the educational institution sets the tasks of the

school counselor and the counselor applies and practices such tasks in the educational field and these practices are based on educational guidance and counseling standards according to the various guidance approaches, namely the development approach, the preventive approach and remedial approach, as most of the counselor's practices are according to these approaches.

School counseling has received attention in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since the establishment of the General Directorate of Guidance and Counseling in 1401 AH. His Excellency the Minister of Education issued Resolution No. 216/ kh-f on 19/10/1401 AH, which provides for the development of the Directorate of Social Education into a General Directorate of Student Guidance and Counseling. The actual application of guidance at the level of educational districts commenced as of the second semester of 1402 AH (Abu Abbadah and Niazi, 2001).

Accordingly, national professional standards for the school counselor have been designed in a way that is compatible with the culture of Saudi society, are based on local experiences and meet the Saudi national needs (Education and Training Evaluation Commission, 2017) and the professional standards for the school counselor have been defined as stated in the Guide of Professional Standards for the Student Counselor (2017) and (2020), in six areas: The area of foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling, the area of characteristics and demands of growth, the area of information-gathering tools, the area of counseling programs, the area of growth and professional development and the area of ethical and professional responsibilities.

The professional standards of the school counselor include the knowledge and skills that the counselor should have and possess, as well as things and actions that he should have the ability to do in the field of

school counseling, including knowledge and skills associated with its field and related effective guidance practices and to demonstrate the characteristics and values expected of him so that his practices and behavior reflect the role entrusted to him, all relevant pedagogical and psychological care for the students at all levels of education (Education and Training Evaluation Commission, 2020). The criteria for school counselors were issued to attain the required quality and effectiveness of the guidance and counseling professional practice in the schools according to the professional criteria required for this practice in the area of school guidance and counseling (Education and Training Evaluation Commission, 2017).

Several professional studies addressed the professional competencies of the school counselor, guidance practices and roles in the field of education. To explore the guiding skills, we find many studies on the degree of availability of professional skills for counselors, including some studies indicating the high availability of professional competencies for counselors (Al-Rabdi, 2014, Al-Zahrani, 2016, Shahin and Al Qasis, 2017, Al-Juhani, 2019, Al-Enazi, 2011). However, the study by Al-Badarneh and Al Samadi (2019) indicated the availability of the counselor professional competencies in medium degree and some studies referred to the availability of school counselor professional competencies in low degree (Mustafa 2011, Shaman, 2016, Saadawi 2018, 2019 Schuerman, Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy & Chen-Hayes, 2011; House & Sears, 2002).

Concerning demographic variables; it noted that there were statistically significant differences attributable to experience (Shahin and Al Qasis, 2017, Shaman, 2016, Al Samadi, 2016, Al-Bahdal, 2014, Na, 2012, (Feather & Carlson, 201). The study by (Al-Rabdi, 2014, Al-Juhani, 2019) showed that there are no statistical differences attributable to variable

experience and concerning the specialty variable, the study by (Shaman, 2016, Shahin and Al Qasis, 2017, Saadawi, 2018) that there are statistical differences attributable to the specialty variable for specialists in school counseling and psychology and the results of the study by (Na, 2012, Yuksel-Sahina, 2012, Al Samadi, 2016) males possess guiding competencies more than female. The study by Al-Zahrani, (2016) referred to females' possession of guiding skills more than males. Some studies have indicated that there are no statistically significant differences in the possession of cadres attributable to gender, Shahin and Al Qasis, 2017, Saadawi 2018, Al-Badarneh and Al Samadi 2019). The study by (Yuksel-Sahina, 2012)) indicated that there are statistically significant differences attributable to the stage of school variable in favor of secondary schools. The study by Al-Juhani, (2019) showed that there are no statistically significant differences attributable to the stage of school variable.

As for the studies that dealt with the degree of practicing the counselors' professional competencies, including the studies that indicated the practice of the counselors' professional competencies in a high degree (Al-Ghanmi, 2013; Muslih and Harzallah, 2017; Al-Huwaish, 2017; Momena, 2017; Al-Quraishah, 2020; Al-Qa'dan, 2019) and a study (Tashtoush and Mazahirah, 2012; Abu Zaitoun, 2014) indicated that the counselors' practice the professional competencies to a medium degree and both (Tashtoush and Mazahirah, 2012; Muslih and Harzallah, 2017) indicated that there are statistically significant differences attributed to the variable of the experience, while several studies showed that there are no statistically significant differences attributed to the specialty (Al-Ghanmi, 2013, Abu Zeitoun, 2014, Al-Huwaish, 2017, Al-Qa'dan, 2019, Al-Enazi, 2011; Al-Bahdal, 2014) and concerning the specialty, it showed that the specialized counselor was practicing the

counseling competencies more than non-specialist ones (Tashtoush and Mazahirah, 2012, Al-Ghanmi, 2013, Al-Huwaish, 2017). The results of studies are varied in terms of the fundamental differences in the practice of counseling competencies depending on the gender variable, as some of these studies indicated that there were no statistically significant differences. (Tashtoush, Mazahirah, 2012, Abu Zeitoun, 2014, Al-Qa'dan, 2019, Al-Bahdal, 2014), Some studies have indicated that there are statistically significant differences in favor of females. (Muslih and Harzallah 2017, Al-Huwaish, 2017, Al-Bahdal, 2014). As for the school stage, Al-Huwaish (2017) indicated that there are no statistically significant differences attributable to the stage of school variable.

The study by Al-Enazi (2011) indicated that there is a statistically significant effect of personal and professional competencies in predicting the success of the counselor at work. The study by Hawatmeh and Al Samadi (2020) also showed that professional character explained (15%) of the variation in the effectiveness of the counselor, while self-competence explained (10%) of the variation in the effectiveness of the counselor. A study by Nazerin (2021) showed that the personal characteristics and professional ambition of student counselors are predictive of counseling self-efficacy.

The importance of the study is to support the training and self-development programs of in-service counselors with information about the needs of the development programs and the programs of preparing the counselors in universities at the level of the school guide's possession of the professional competencies and the level of his practice thereof, in addition to supporting the graduate programs with results of achieving their outputs through the study by practicing counselors in schools.

The importance of the study is that it provides a tool that helps identify the

counseling professional competencies and the practicing thereof by counselors, as well as supporting decision-makers in the Ministry of Education with results obtained from school counselors, who represent an important segment of the educational field.

### **Study Problem**

The professional competencies necessary for the school counselor are important in enabling him to play his role and aid during the implementation of the stages of the counseling process. The school counselor performs many tasks and roles, such as counseling, consulting, coordinating and communicating with students, their parents and teachers and this requires him to be highly qualified to perform the things that he shall do and given the important role of the school counselor, the Education and Training Evaluation Commission represented by the National Center for Assessment has focused on the professional standards of the school counselor by developing a clear and hopeful perception of the performance of the counselors and their professional competencies. Although the National Center for Assessment conducted a test for university students who are candidates for the profession of school counseling. However, many gaps noted in the counseling work in its current form and the low levels of school counselors' performance and the current outputs of the existing school counseling programs did not achieve much of its objectives (Ministry of Education, 2019, Saadawi, 2018).

Also, practitioners (on their job) in the field are not subject to any evaluation on the extent to which they possess and practice professional competencies, leading to the emergence of the need to evaluate the school counselor's possession of professional competencies and the degree to which he practices such competencies. The evaluation process will be carried out according to the professional standards of the school counselor, which indicate that the counselor

should be familiar with the foundations and theories of guidance and counseling, the characteristics of growth, information collection tools, the design of counseling programs, professional development, adherence to professional ethics and the degree of practice of these competencies by the counselor according to the type of school and the stage of school. Therefore, the school counselors' professional competencies measured in the form of indicators related to the school counselors' general standards of the competencies; so that the counselor determines his adequacy and the extent of his practice thereof.

### Research Questions

1. What is the level of the school counselor's possession and practice of the professional competencies based on the professional standards for educational guidance and counseling?
2. What are the differences between the degree to which the school counselor possesses and practices professional competencies due to (experience, specialty, gender, nature of the school and type of school)?

### Study Approach

A descriptive approach.

### Population and Sample of the Study:

The study population consisted of all the counselors working in the Ministry of Education schools, affiliated with the Department of Education in the Eastern Region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the first semester of the school year 1443 AH, which are (1109) male and female counselors. A sample of 323 male and female counselors selected through the facilitator appointment (Non-random Availability Sampling), as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of the study sample according to Gender, nature of the school, experience, specialty and stage of school**

Variable and its Levels	Frequency	%	Variable and its Levels	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Experience</b>		
Male	167	51.7	Under 5 years	70	21.7
Female	156	48.3	At 5 to less than 10 years	98	30.3
Total	323	100	At 10 to less than 15 years	60	18.6
<b>Nature of School</b>			At 15 years or more	95	29.4
Governmental	274	84.8	Total	323	100
Private	49	15.2			
Total	323	100			
<b>Educational level</b>			<b>Specialty</b>		
Primary Education	109	33.7	Counseling and Psychology	110	34.1

Intermediate Education	107	33.1	Sociology and Social Work	79	24.5
Secondary Education	107	33.1	Others	134	41.5
Total	323	100	Total	323	100

### Measurement of the school counselor's possession and practice of the professional competencies based on the professional standards for educational guidance and counseling.

To build two scales of school counselor's possession and practice of professional competencies, **Face Validity** was verified by deriving phrases by referring to the procedural guide of the professional standards of the school counselor issued by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission and the National Center for Assessment affiliated with Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the year 2020. Both scales formed initially of forty-seven phrases for each one of them. To verify (**Logical Validity**) of the two scales, both presented to a group of inter-raters consisting of nine inter-raters and the number of the two scales phrases in the final form was composed of forty-three phrases for each one of them.

To calculate the validity of internal consistency, the two measures applied separately to a reconnaissance sample consisting of (65) counselors other than the study sample and according to the values of Pearson correlation coefficients for the relationship of the phrases of each one of the competencies possession dimensions. The stability of the internal consistency of the two measures and their dimensions calculated for each of them separately for the reconnaissance sample using the Cronbach's alpha equation and its value for the scale of possessing professional competencies was (0.982) and its values for its dimensions ranged between (0.891-0.948). The scale of practice was (0.979)

and its values for its dimensions ranged between (0.860-0.943) and the reliability of the two scales was calculated according to McDonald's omega and its value for the scale of possessing professional competencies was (0.979) and its values for its dimensions ranged between (0.876-0.976), the scale of professional persistence was (0.977) and its dimension values ranged from (0.877-0.939).

Confirmatory Validity was conducted, excluding outliers by calculating the Mahalanobis distance for all the basic study sample members of (323) school counselors for the two models of the ability of school counselors' possession and practice for professional competency dimensions to find individuals who abuse the ability to model possession and a school counselor's practice of professional dimensions, verification of the multiple natural distribution of the phrases of school counselor's possession and practice of professional competencies dimensions has been achieved through the calculation, by calculating skewness and kurtosis indicators of the two models, the values of the matching indicators were verified [ $\chi^2$ ,  $\chi^2/df$ , SRMR, NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI (RNI), RMSEA, Information Criteria (AIC, BCC, BIC, CAIC)] for models of the ability of school counselor to possess and practice the professional competencies dimensions. The non-normative and normative regression factors for models of the ability of school counselor to possess and practice the professional competencies dimensions and the associated variations and correlations between their dimensions and each pair of faults in measuring the adjusted dimensions phrases according to adjustment indicators and variations for interpretation of

dimensional phrases, variations of dimension that predicts phrases and variations in predicted phrases measurement errors.

**The Study Findings, Explanation and Interpretation thereof**

**First: Findings related to the study question: "What is the level of the**

**school counselor’s possession and practice of the professional competencies based on the professional standards for educational guidance and counseling?**

The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the counselors’ professional competencies, one-sample (t) test and the Cohen’s effect size calculated as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Results of (t) test of the means for the counselors’ possession and practice of the professional competencies and its dimensions based on the professional standards of educational guidance and counseling and Cohen's effect size.**

Dimension ID	Mean	Standard Deviation	One Sample T-Test			Cohen’s Effect Size		
			Value	Rank	Level	Value	Interpreted Variation	Classification
<b>COUNSELORS’ POSSESSING THE COMPETENCIES OF EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING</b>								
<b>Dimension of ethical and professional responsibilities competencies</b>								
6	4.48	0.57	46.61*	1	High	2.59	62.59 %	High
<b>Dimension of characteristics of growth and its professional demands competencies</b>								
2	4.11	0.66	30.24*	2	High	1.68	41.31 %	High
<b>Dimension of professional counseling programs competencies</b>								
4	4.02	0.67	27.09*	3	High	1.50	36.12 %	High
<b>Dimension of the professional foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling competencies</b>								
1	3.98	0.67	26.18*	4	High	1.45	34.55 %	High
<b>Dimension of professional development competencies</b>								
5	3.98	0.79	22.20*	5	High	1.23	27.51 %	High
<b>Dimension of information collection tools competencies</b>								
3	3.78	0.78	17.88*	6	High	0.99	19.74 %	Intermediate
<b>Total of the school counselor’s possession of the professional educational counseling competencies</b>								
	4.08	0.58	33.21*		High	1.84	45.92 %	High

**COUNSELORS’ PRACTICING THE COMPETENCIES OF EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING**

**Dimension of ethical and professional responsibilities competencies**



6	4.40	0.57	43.90*	1	High	2.44	59.75 %	High
<b>Dimension of characteristics of growth and its professional demands competencies</b>								
2	3.98	0.70	25.06*	2	High	1.39	32.60 %	High
<b>Dimension of the professional foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling competencies</b>								
1	3.88	0.68	23.06*	3	High	1.28	29.06 %	High
<b>Dimension of professional counseling programs competencies</b>								
4	3.86	0.69	22.47*	4	High	1.25	27.99 %	High
<b>Dimension of professional development competencies</b>								
5	3.86	0.82	18.98*	5	High	1.05	21.74 %	Intermediate
<b>Dimension of information collection tools competencies</b>								
3	3.63	0.77	14.58*	6	High	0.81	14.09 %	Intermediate
<b>Total of school counselor's practice of professional competencies</b>								
	3.96	0.59	28.97*		High	1.61	39.26 %	High

\*  $p \leq 0.05$

It is noted from Table 2 that the possession of counselors' professional competencies came within a high level; with a high interpreted variation of (45.92%) and all dimensions came within a high level with high interpreted variations ranging from (27.51% to 62.59%), except for information collection tools, which came an average level with an interpreted variation of (19.74%).

This result is consistent in terms of that the professional competencies recording a high level among the counselors with the results of the studies by Zeleke, Karayigit & Brooks (Zeleke, Karayigit & Brooks, 2018), Shahin and Al Qasis (2017) and Al-Rabdi (2014), Na (Na, 2021) and Yuksel-Sahina (Yuksel-Sahina, 2012). This result varies in terms of professional competencies coming within a medium or low level among the counselors with the results of studies by Saadawi (2018), Yuksel-Sahina (Yuksel-Sahina, 2012), Shaman (2016), Al-Badarneh and Al Samadi (2019) and Mustafa (2011).

It is noted from Table 2 that the professional competencies practice by the counselors came within a high level; with a high interpreted variation of (39.26%) and all dimensions came within a high level with high interpreted variations ranging from (27.99% to 59.75%), except for the dimension of the professional development and the dimension of the information collection tools, which came an average level with an interpreted variation of (21.74%) and (14.09%), respectively. This result is consistent with the results of the studies by Shahin and Al Qasis (2017), Al-Ghanmi, (2013), Al-Qa'dan (2012), Al-Huwaish (2017) and Momena (2017). This result differs in terms of the counseling services practiced by the counselors within an intermediate level with the results of the studies by Al-Ghanmi (2013) and Abu Zeitoun (2014).

This result can be attributed to the fact that the counselors, based on their qualities, sense of responsibility and personal and professional ability, supported by

professional educational counseling competencies, possess and practice sufficient knowledge and awareness, competence and applied and technical skills that have been acquired through training or study in line with the originality of their role based on the complexity of students' societal and school problems due to the rapid changes that occur in societies based on modern globalization through their effective and influential school guidance for students in educational institutions, which is one of the basic pillars in the process of building cognitively integrated generations, emotionally and behaviorally compatible with their environment by helping them achieve their psychological, social and

academic compatibility and development in a manner suitable for their abilities, capabilities, aptitudes and tendencies.

**Second: Findings related to the study question: "What are the differences between the degree to which the school counselor possesses and practices professional competencies due to (experience, specialty, gender, nature of school, stage of school)?"**

The means and standard deviations for counselors' possession and practice of professional competencies calculated separately due to gender, nature of school, experience, specialty and stage of school, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Means and standard deviations for counselors' possession and practice of professional competencies and its dimensions due to gender, nature of school, experience, specialty and stage of school.**

Variable, its levels and Statistic	Dimensions of counselors' professional competencies							Whole Scale	
	Foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling	Characteristics and demands of Growth	Information collection tools	Counseling Programs	Professional Development	Ethical and professional responsibilities			
<b>Gender</b>									
<b>Male</b>									
167	M	4.03	4.08	3.86	4.05	3.97	4.50	4.11	
67	S	0.64	0.65	0.76	0.68	0.79	0.56	0.58	
7	D								
<b>Female</b>									
<b>Possession</b>	156	M	3.93	4.14	3.68	3.98	4.00	4.45	4.05
	56	S	0.71	0.67	0.80	0.66	0.80	0.58	0.59
	6	D							
<b>Nature of School</b>									
<b>Governmental</b>									
27	M	3.97	4.12	3.74	4.01	3.98	4.48	4.07	
74	S	0.66	0.63	0.78	0.66	0.80	0.54	0.57	
4	D								
<b>Private</b>									

Variable, its levels and Statistic		Dimensions of counselors' professional competencies						Wh ole Sca le
		Foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling	Charact eristics and demand s of Growth	Infor mation collecti on tools	Couns eling Progr ams	Profess ional Develo pment	Ethical and professi onal responsi bilities	
4	M	4.01	4.07	3.99	4.07	3.99	4.48	4.1 2
9	S D	0.74	0.81	0.79	0.72	0.79	0.72	0.6 7
<b>Experience</b>								
<b>Under 5 years</b>								
7	M	3.75	3.87	3.71	3.92	3.87	4.32	3.9 4
0	S D	0.66	0.74	0.79	0.64	0.89	0.72	0.6 1
<b>At 5 to less than 10 years</b>								
9	M	4.05	4.18	3.87	4.10	4.12	4.56	4.1 7
8	S D	0.63	0.61	0.77	0.61	0.71	0.47	0.5 3
<b>At 10 to less than 15 years</b>								
6	M	3.98	4.06	3.72	3.95	3.84	4.46	4.0 3
0	S D	0.73	0.66	0.80	0.75	0.78	0.52	0.6 1
<b>At 15 years or more</b>								
9	M	4.07	4.24	3.78	4.03	4.01	4.52	4.1 3
5	S D	0.66	0.60	0.78	0.70	0.79	0.55	0.5 9
<b>Specialty</b>								
<b>Counseling and Psychology</b>								
1	M	4.18	4.26	4.04	4.24	4.15	4.60	4.2 7
1	S D	0.64	0.56	0.69	0.58	0.68	0.48	0.5 0
<b>Sociology and Social Work</b>								
7	M	4.10	4.13	3.89	4.03	4.06	4.45	4.1 3
9	S D	0.51	0.64	0.68	0.63	0.61	0.50	0.4 9
<b>Others</b>								
	M	3.75	3.97	3.49	3.82	3.80	4.39	3.9 0

Variable, its levels and Statistic		Dimensions of counselors' professional competencies						Whole Scale		
		Foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling	Characteristics and demands of Growth	Information collection tools	Counseling Programs	Professional Development	Ethical and professional responsibilities			
Practice	134	S D	0.71	0.72	0.82	0.71	0.93	0.65	0.65	
	<b>Educational level</b>									
	<b>Primary Education</b>									
	109	M S D	4.00	4.14	3.76	4.00	4.00	4.53	0.59	4.09
	<b>Intermediate Education</b>									
	107	M S D	3.91	4.01	3.68	3.92	3.91	4.40	0.55	3.99
	<b>Secondary Education</b>									
	107	M S D	4.03	4.17	3.89	4.13	4.03	4.49	0.64	4.15
	<b>Gender</b>									
	<b>Male</b>									
	167	M S D	3.86	3.87	3.61	3.81	3.76	4.37	0.58	3.91
	<b>Female</b>									
	156	M S D	3.89	4.09	3.64	3.92	3.97	4.43	0.56	4.01
	<b>Nature of School</b>									
<b>Governmental</b>										
274	M S D	3.88	3.99	3.60	3.87	3.87	4.41	0.54	3.96	
<b>Private</b>										

Variable, its levels and Statistic		Dimensions of counselors' professional competencies						Wh ole Sca le
		Foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling	Charact eristics and demand s of Growth	Infor mation collecti on tools	Couns eling Progr ams	Profess ional Develo pment	Ethical and professi onal responsi bilities	
4	M	3.86	3.88	3.74	3.83	3.82	4.32	3.9 3
9	S D	0.80	0.90	0.85	0.83	0.91	0.72	0.7 4
<b>Experience</b>								
<b>Under 5 years</b>								
7	M	3.60	3.72	3.56	3.74	3.77	4.23	3.7 9
0	S D	0.70	0.77	0.79	0.69	0.90	0.69	0.6 2
<b>At 5 to less than 10 years</b>								
9	M	3.92	3.98	3.65	3.90	3.94	4.45	4.0 0
8	S D	0.65	0.69	0.76	0.64	0.76	0.54	0.5 6
<b>At 10 to less than 15 years</b>								
6	M	3.87	3.95	3.51	3.82	3.73	4.37	3.9 1
0	S D	0.66	0.64	0.75	0.73	0.78	0.48	0.5 7
<b>At 15 years or more</b>								
9	M	4.04	4.18	3.72	3.95	3.93	4.49	4.0 7
5	S D	0.67	0.64	0.78	0.71	0.83	0.54	0.6 0
<b>Specialty</b>								
<b>Counseling and Psychology</b>								
1	M	3.92	3.96	3.68	3.92	3.93	4.45	4.0 0
1	S D	0.67	0.70	0.77	0.66	0.76	0.54	0.5 7
<b>Sociology and Social Work</b>								
7	M	4.06	4.02	3.79	3.90	3.92	4.35	4.0 2
9	S D	0.56	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.74	0.52	0.5 5
<b>Others</b>								
	M	3.73	3.96	3.49	3.80	3.77	4.39	3.8 8

Variable, its levels and Statistic	Dimensions of counselors' professional competencies							Whole Scale
	Foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling	Characteristics and demands of Growth	Information collection tools	Counseling Programs	Professional Development	Ethical and professional responsibilities		
134	SD	0.73	0.71	0.79	0.71	0.90	0.63	0.63
<b>Educational level</b>								
<b>Primary Education</b>								
109	M	3.95	4.08	3.68	3.89	3.94	4.49	4.02
	SD	0.65	0.66	0.82	0.71	0.78	0.49	0.58
<b>Intermediate Education</b>								
107	M	3.77	3.84	3.50	3.78	3.80	4.33	3.86
	SD	0.67	0.69	0.72	0.63	0.80	0.54	0.56
<b>Secondary Education</b>								
107	M	3.90	4.00	3.69	3.92	3.84	4.38	3.98
	SD	0.71	0.73	0.76	0.73	0.86	0.66	0.64

M: Arithmetic Mean

SD: Standard Deviation

It is noted from Table 3 that there are an observed differences among the means for possession and practice of professional competencies by the counselors due to the different levels of Gender, the nature of the school, experience, specialty and the stage

of school; and to verify the materiality of the apparent differences, a customized model for 5-Way ANOVA test was conducted between the possession and practice of professional competencies by the counselors as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: The results of a customized model for the 5-Way ANOVA test between the possession and practice of professional competencies by the counselors due to gender, nature of school, experience, specialty and stage of school.**

Source of variance	Possession of professional competencies					Practice of professional competencies					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sign.	Effect Size	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sign.

Gender	0.13	1	0.13	0.42	0.52	0.1%	1.68	1	1.68	5.05*	0.03	1.6%
Nature of School	0.68	1	0.68	2.25	0.14	0.7%	0.17	1	0.17	0.52	0.47	0.2%
Experience	4.80	3	1.60	5.26*	0.00	4.8%	4.71	3	1.57	4.71*	0.00	4.3%
Specialty	8.83	2	4.42	14.51*	0.00	8.5%	2.64	2	1.32	3.97*	0.02	2.5%
Educational level	1.86	2	0.93	3.06*	0.05	1.9%	2.29	2	1.14	3.43*	0.03	2.1%
Error	95.25	31	0.30					31	104.			
		3						3	32			
Total	109.9	32						32	113.			
	1	2						2	62			

\*  $p \leq 0.05$

Table 4 shows that there is no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means attributed to gender and the nature of the school and there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means attributed to Experience, specialty and the stage of school; and the use of the James-Howell test for multiple dimensional comparisons **and** it was found that the counselors have professional competencies available to the counselors having experience (between 5-9 years) with a mean of (4.17), which is higher than those with experience (less than 5 years) with a mean of (3.94). It was found that the professional competencies are available to the counselors whose specialty (counseling and psychology) with a mean of (4.27), which is higher than their specialties (others) with a mean of (3.90), as well as the persons whose specialty (Sociology and Social Work) a mean of (4.13), which is higher than their specialties (others) with a mean of (3.90). Also found that professional competencies are available to the counselors at the secondary level with an average of (4.15), which is higher than the middle stage with a mean of (3.99).

Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means attributed to gender. Female counselors have a mean of (4.01),

which is higher than male counselors with a mean of (3.91). It is also clear that there is no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means attributed to the nature of the school and there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means attributed to Experience, specialty and stage of school. James-Howell Post Hoc test of multiple comparisons used and it found that the counselors' practice of the professional competencies recorded among experienced counselors (fifteen years and above) have a mean of (4.07), then the counselors having experience (less than 5 years) with a mean of (3.79). It was found that the counselors' practice of the professional competencies recorded among counselors specialized in (Sociology and Social Work) with a mean of (4.02), which is higher than the counselor specialized in (others) with a mean of (3.88) and it was found that the counselors' practice of professional competencies recorded among counselors working at (primary education) school type with a mean of (4.02), which is higher than counselors working at (Intermediate Education) school type with a mean of (3.86).

It noted from Table 3 that there are an observed differences among the means for possession and practice of professional competencies dimension by the counselors due to the various levels of gender, nature of

school, experience, specialty and stage of school. To determine the differences, a

customized model for 5-Way ANOVA test had conducted as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: The results of a customized model for 5-Way ANOVA test between the possession and practice of professional competencies dimension by the counselors due to gender, nature of school, experience, specialty and stage of school.**

Effect	5-Way MANOVA test Type	Possession of professional competencies					Practice of professional competencies					Effect Size	
		Value	Whole F	df of:		Sig.	Effect Size	Value	Whole F	df of:			Sig.
				Hypothesis	Error					Hypothesis	Error		
<b>Gender</b>													
	Hotelling's Trace	0.07	3.36*	6	308	0.00	6.10%	0.08	4.05*	6	308	0.00	7.30%
<b>Nature of School</b>													
	Hotelling's Trace	0.03	1.26	6	308	0.027	2.40%	0.01	0.45	6	308	0.085	0.90%
<b>Experience</b>													
	Wilks' Lambda	0.87	2.49*	18	871	0.064	4.60%	0.05	2.81*	18	871	0.064	5.20%
<b>Specialty</b>													
	Wilks' Lambda	0.87	3.72*	12	616	0.00	6.80%	0.01	2.61*	12	616	0.00	4.80%
<b>Stage of School</b>													
	Wilks' Lambda	0.96	1.13	12	616	0.033	2.20%	0.05	1.48	12	616	0.013	2.80%

\* p≤0.05

Table 5 shows that there is no statistically significant effect ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) for each of (the nature of the school and the stage of school) and that there is a statistically significant effect ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) for each of (gender, experience and specialty) concerning means of counselors' possession and practice of professional competencies dimensions collectively. To determine which dimension is subject to the impact of (gender, experience and specialty), a customized

model for 5-Way ANOVA test conducted between the possession and practice of professional competencies by the counselors separately.

The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the counselors' possession of professional competencies dimension (growth characteristics and demands) attributed to gender; where the female counselors recorded results more



than male counselors and this result is consistent with study by Na study (Na, 2021) in terms of a statistically significant difference between the means of professional competencies among social counselors and does not agree with the result of the Yuksel-Sahina study (Yuksel-Sahina, 2012) in terms of a statistically significant difference attributed to gender; in favor of counselors.

The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the two means of practicing the professional competencies and dimensions thereof (growth characteristics and demands, counseling programs and professional development) attributed to gender, where females recorded results more than males. This result is consistent with the results of the Al-Huwaish study (2017) and this result does not agree with the results of the studies of Al-Qa'dan (2012) and Abu Zeitoun (2014).

This result can be attributed to the specificity of the effects resulting from characteristics of growth and its demands for female students related to their physical and psychological health, attainment and behavior more than what is associated with the characteristics of growth and its demands for male students in the light of their different physical, psychological and social needs of males and females. This requires female counselors to adapt the counseling programs directed to female students to suit the specific characteristics of growth and its demands among female students more than it requires male counselors to adapt the counseling programs directed to students to suit the specific characteristics of growth and its demands among male students, which leads to a preference in the practice of professional development by female counselors more than the case when practicing professional development by male counselors.

While it is clear that there is no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ )

between the two means of the counselors' possession of dimensions (foundations, theories and approaches of guidance, information collection tools, counseling programs, professional development and ethical and professional responsibilities) attributed to gender, as this result is consistent with the results of the studies of Saadawi(2018), Shaheen and Al Qasis (2017) in terms of the absence of a statistically significant difference between the two means of counseling skills attributed to gender.

It showed that there is no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the two means of the counselors' possession of professional competencies in all dimensions, as it is attributable to the nature of the school and showed no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of counselors' practice of dimensions of (foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling, information collection tools and ethical and professional responsibilities), attributed to gender and this result is consistent with the result of a study by Tashtoush and Mazahirah (2012). This result is inconsistent with the result of a study by Muslih and Harzallah (2017). It showed no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the counselor's practice of professional competencies attributable to the nature of the school.

This result can be attributed to the fact that there is no difference in the practice of providing counseling services on the part of counselors to students based on their different needs according to their demands and according to the nature of their school; it is attributed to the fact that counselors receive the same training experiences.

It showed significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of counselors' possession of professional competencies and their dimensions (information collection tools, ethical and professional responsibilities) attributable to experience,

where counselors of low experience (5-9 years) have these competencies more than those having extremely low experience (less than 5 years).

It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of counselors' possession of the two dimensions of professional competencies (foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling, characteristics of growth and its demands) attributed to experience; where each of the counselors has experience: a) Very high (fifteen years and older) more than those having very low experience (less than 5 years) and then b) low (5 to less than 10 years) more than those having very low experience (less than 5 years) and this result is consistent with the results of the studies by Feather and Carlson (Feather & Carlson, 2019); Shaheen and Al Qasis (2017) and NA (Na, 2021) and Shaman (2016), this finding differs with the results of the studies by Al-Juhani (2019); and Al-Rabdi (2014). This result can be attributed to the fact that the growth, continuity and experience of possessing the professional competencies, to which the counselors are exposed, are developing in line with the development of the practice of the previous professional competencies represented by (mastery experience, delegation experience, persuasion experience, emotional and physiological cases) over the years in the field of work through receiving specialized courses in counseling, receiving procedural counselors for the required guiding competencies and the process of self- and external evaluation according to its mastery.

It showed significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the counselors' possession of the professional competencies (professional development) dimension attributed to experience, where the counselors of low experience (At 5 to less than 10 years) have these competencies more than those having high experience (At

10 to less than 15 years).

It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the counselors' practice of professional competencies and their dimensions (characteristics and demands of growth, ethical and professional responsibilities) attributed to experience; counselors of very high experience (fifteen years and older) have these competencies more than those of very low experience (less than 5 years).

It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the counselors' practice of professional competencies (foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling) dimension, attributed to experience; where each one of the counselors has experience: a) Very high (fifteen years and older) more than those having very low experience (less than 5 years) and then b) low (5 to less than 10 years) more than those having very low experience (less than 5 years).

This result is consistent with the results of the studies of Muslih and Harzallah (2017) and Tashtoush and Mazhara (2012) and does not agree with the results of the study by Al-Ghanmi (2013), Al-Qa'dan (2012), Al-Huwaish (2017) and Abu Zeitoun (2014).

This strange result can be attributed to the likelihood that this category of low-experience counselors has more desire for professional development than the category of counselors having high experience and due to the likelihood of their performance of counseling work more than the category of counselors of higher experience; under the specificity of the sites to which they belong, which leads to professional development by their own party. As there is a possibility that the category of counselors with higher experience related to specialty other than counseling and psychology.

They showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the counselors' possession of professional competencies and dimensions thereof (the

foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling,, information collection tools and professional development) attributed to specialty, where each of the counselors has: a) Those specialize in (counseling and psychology) more than specialties (others) and b) those specialize in (Sociology and Social Work) more than specialty (others).

While it showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of counselors' possession of professional competencies (growth characteristics and demands, counseling programs and ethical and professional responsibilities) dimensions, attributed to specialty, as counselors specialize in (counseling and psychology) having this more than counselors specialize in (others) and this result is consistent with the results of the studies by Shaheen and Al Qassis (2017); Saadawi (2018); Shaman (2016); and (2019) Griffin, where teachers took over the counseling responsibility (Cauchi, Falzon, Micallef & Sammut, 2017) and (Stockton, Nitza, & Bhusumane, 2010).

It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of counselors' practice of professional competencies and dimension thereof (information collection tools) attributed to the specialty. Counselors who specialize in (Sociology and Social Work) have these competencies more than those who specialize in (others). It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between means of counselors' practice of the professional competencies (foundations, theories and approaches of guidance and counseling) dimension, attributed to the specialty, as each of the counselors has: a) Those who specialize in (Sociology and Social Work) have competencies more than those who specialize in (others), b) Those who specialize in (counseling and psychology) have competencies more than those who specialize in (others) and showed significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the

means of the counselors' practice of professional competencies (professional development) dimensions, attributed to the specialty; where counselors who specialize in (counseling and psychology) have these competencies more than those who specialize in (others) and this result is consistent with the results of the studies by Shaheen and Al Qassis (2017), Al-Ghanmi (2013), Al-Huwaish (2017), Tashtoush and Mazhara (2012).

This result can be attributed to the fact that school counseling is a professional and specialized work that requires academic preparation and professional training in the humanities, such as: Psychology, sociology and social work and that the scientific qualification of the student counselor is of great importance for the success of his work in guidance and counseling and the importance of the student counselor obtaining a specialized scientific qualification that allows him to work in guidance and counseling. The educational counselor with his scientific background and field experience has a vital role in the school and the school counselor who specializes in the field of counseling is superior in professional performance compared to the non-specialist counselor who is being accepted extensively as a school counselor under the pressure of the idea of needing more counselors who are not specialized in educational counseling based on the lack of availability of specialized counselors in educational counseling, provided that they study the diploma of guidance and counseling to bridge the gap between them and their specialized counselors and to be able to carry out the tasks required from them.

It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the possession of professional competencies by the counselors attributed to the school stage, where the counselors working in (secondary) schools have these competencies more than those working in

(intermediate) schools and this result is consistent with the result of the Yuksel-Sahina study (Yuksel-Sahina, 2012) and this result differs with the result of the Al-Juhani study (2019).

It showed that there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the means of the practice of professional competencies by counselors attributed to the school stage. Counselors who are working in (primary) schools have these competencies more than those working in (intermediate) schools and this result does not agree with the results of the study by Al-Huwaish (2017).

This result can be attributed to the difference in the demands and requirements of growth from one school stage to another, which results in a difference in the possession of professional competencies commensurate with the nature of the school stage and that secondary school counselors provide counseling services so that the role of counselors become more effective and clearer, because the requirements of the secondary stage are more than the requirements of the previous school stages. This is because secondary school students need guidance, investment and raising their abilities based on the nature of the adolescence they are going through, the clarity of their abilities and the importance of the decisions they face related to planning their lives.

After presenting the previous results, it is noted that these results are consistent with the results of the Al-Bahdal study (2014) in the absence of significant differences due to the variable of the school stage concerning the personal factors and self-efficacy of the counselors and Nazerin (2021) in the absence of a statistically significant effect of the interaction of the school stage in which the student counselors work to reach counseling self-efficacy.

This indicates that there are other factors responsible for enriching the exercise of professional competencies by (secondary) schools counselors that are not

associated with their possession thereof, which may be related to their personal qualities, the extent of their motivation to carry out their tasks entrusted to them towards students and the extent of their responsibility towards them.

Both researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education, represented by the General Directorate of Guidance and Counseling and the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, should hold training courses for counselors, focusing on enriching the professional competencies of counselors related to how to design, build and apply counseling programs that take into account the characteristics and demands of growth among male and female students and recommend the need to hold training courses for male and female counselors; focus on enriching the professional competencies of counselors related to how to design, build and apply counseling programs that take into account the characteristics and demands of growth among male and female students.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study investigated the possession and practice of school counselors' professional competencies based on educational guidance and counseling standards, as perceived by counselors themselves. The study involved a total of 1109 male and female counselors, with 323 participants. Two scales developed to assess possession and practice of these competencies, confirming their validity and reliability. Results indicated that counselors demonstrate a high level of possession and practice of professional competencies, explaining 45.92% and 39.26% of the variance, respectively. Gender differences had observed, with females showing higher possession and practice scores, particularly in growth characteristics and demands. Also, significant differences are noted due to experience, specialty and stage of school. Additionally, the study revealed a

statistically significant predictive relationship between possessing and practicing competencies, highlighting the importance of practical application in enhancing professional skills. Furthermore, the predictive ability varied based on experience levels. Based on these findings, recommendations for enhancing counselor training and practice are provided, emphasizing the importance of aligning with professional standards in educational guidance and counseling.

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