A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING REFORM AND STUDENT OPPORTUNITY IN UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT
School counseling in Uzbekistan is still often treated as a secondary component of pastoral work, making its contribution to student success and educational opportunity difficult to identify in routine school management. This study developed a policy framework that redefines school counseling from a management perspective and examined its applicability in school practice. A three-stage pedagogical experiment was conducted, comprising a diagnostic pretest, a formative intervention, and a control posttest. Experimental and control groups were established, and the measurement instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70). Between-group differences were analyzed using t-tests and Cohen's d. The findings indicated clearer management routines, more consistent referral procedures, stronger parent communication, and more student-centered decision-making in the experimental schools, whereas the control schools showed only limited change. Posttest gains were associated primarily with the institutional organization of the counseling process rather than with isolated individual effort. The scientific contribution of the study lies in conceptualizing school counseling as a policy-oriented coordination mechanism linking governance, student guidance, and equitable access to educational support in Uzbekistan.

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Keywords: *academic support, management criteria, referral protocol, student attainment, Uzbekistan, policy framework, role boundaries, road map.*

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Introduction

Uzbekistan's school counseling agenda remains institutionally underdeveloped, although education-sector analyses have already linked uneven support services to unequal learning pathways (World Bank, 2022). UNESCO (2023) likewise warned that technology-rich schooling can widen opportunity gaps when guidance structures are weak. In secondary schools, this weakness affects student success, educational opportunity, and the management capacity of school leadership.

Previous studies in Uzbekistan have examined psychological services, individual counseling, and counseling management separately; however, they have not integrated school counseling into a policy framework focused on measurable educational opportunity (Zokirova, 2021). The missing link is governance: the alignment of counseling standards, leadership routines, and accountability for student support within secondary-school management (Sidorova & Makarova, 2024).

Research object. school counseling in Uzbekistan's secondary schools.

Research subject. the policy-framework conditions associated with student success and educational opportunity.

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The study aimed to redefine school counseling as a policy framework for advancing student success and educational opportunity in Uzbekistan.

1. To analyze counseling governance in secondary-school management.
2. To identify policy gaps in leadership accountability.
3. To specify counseling functions linked to student success.
4. To formulate an educational opportunity framework.
5. To compare experimental and control groups across three phases.
6. To define implementation requirements for school leadership.

The main hypothesis was that a structured counseling policy framework would produce greater improvements in student success and educational opportunity in the experimental group than in the control group.

This study contributed a management-oriented counseling model that integrates school leadership, policy standards, and educational-opportunity outcomes within a single framework (Karimova, 2023). The findings can inform directors, deputy directors, and department heads in designing counseling routines, staff training, and monitoring procedures.

The study combined a scoping review, framework analysis, and qualitative content analysis, and the article was organized around the policy problem, the analytical framework, and the resulting management implications.

Literature Review

The policy framework examined in the methodology remains under-theorized in school counseling research because most studies separate service delivery from governance design. OECD (2021) approaches education policy as a problem of system responsiveness, whereas UNESCO (2023) situates technology and equity within institutional rules rather than within counseling routines. This distinction is important for Uzbekistan, where school counseling cannot be reduced to individual advice if student success is to be managed as a system-level outcome. The literature therefore points toward governance, but it rarely specifies how counseling standards, referral pathways, and leadership accountability should be aligned.

Table 1

Comparative Emphases in School Counseling Literature

Source	Main emphasis	Policy implication
OECD (2021)	Responsive education systems	Counseling should be embedded in school governance
UNESCO (2023)	Equity and access conditions	Counseling should protect educational opportunity
World Bank (2022)	Sector constraints in Uzbekistan	Counseling reform needs institutional coordination

Note. Compiled from the cited sources.

The pattern summarized in Table 1 confirms a structural gap between student support and administrative regulation. The World Bank (2022) describes fragmentation in service provision, whereas Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) argue that learning conditions improve when adults coordinate developmental supports across the school. Hattie (2023) reinforces this argument by demonstrating the value of visible, school-wide feedback structures relative to isolated interventions. Taken together, these studies suggest that counseling becomes effective when it is governed as a policy framework rather than treated as an auxiliary office function.

A second cluster of studies shifts attention from access to measurable indicators of student success. Schleicher (2023) links equity to the dispersion of achievement, indicating that educational opportunity

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should be assessed through participation, persistence, and attainment rather than enrollment alone. Zokirova (2021) and Qodirova (2022) both situate individual counseling within school practice, but their emphasis remains on service techniques rather than managerial accountability. Karimova (2023) and Tursunova (2024) extend the discussion to psychological-pedagogical management and socio-emotional competence, yet they do not operationalize educational-opportunity outcomes for secondary schools. This leaves a methodological gap for indicators that connect counseling governance with student-success trajectories.

A similar limitation appears in Russian-language scholarship on the organization of school counseling. Ivanova (2021) treats psychological and pedagogical support as a tool for educational modernization, while Smirnova and Petrova (2022) connect counseling with the prevention of academic failure. Kuznetsova (2023) and Sidorova and Makarova (2024) move closer to a management perspective, but their models continue to emphasize institutional structure over measurable gains in educational opportunity. Ergashev (2021) and Allaberganova (2025) are particularly relevant to Uzbekistan because they address school psychological services and counselor activity; however, neither study tests whether governance reform changes student-success indicators across comparable schools. The remaining gap is a policy-oriented counseling model that can be evaluated against educational-opportunity outcomes in the Uzbekistan context.

Method

The pretest matrix for school counseling policy was aligned with the evidence gap identified in the scoping review and then operationalized in a three-stage pedagogical experiment. The design involved comparable secondary schools in Uzbekistan, with experimental and control groups observed over one academic year, because counseling governance needed to be tested against student success and educational opportunity rather than described only in abstract terms (World Bank, 2022). Source-critical coding was applied to policy documents, school regulations, and counseling protocols selected for their direct relevance to management practice (Sidorova & Makarova, 2024). The operational categories are presented in Table 2, where school counseling, the policy framework, student success, and educational opportunity are differentiated through observable indicators.

Table 2

Operationalization of the Study Variables

Variable	Operational indicator	Data source
School counseling	access, referral, follow-up	questionnaire and observation checklist
Policy framework	rule clarity, role allocation, monitoring	school documents and administrator responses
Student success	attendance, task completion, progression	student success scale
Educational opportunity	guidance access, participation, support continuity	questionnaire and document analysis

Note. Author's compilation.

The ascertainment phase established baseline comparability before the formative intervention began. Cochran's formula was used to justify the sample size at 95% confidence and 5% precision, providing a defensible basis for comparison in school-management research (OECD, 2021). During the intervention phase, counseling procedures, leadership routines, and referral pathways were introduced in the experimental group, while the control group retained ordinary practice. The control posttest assessed

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whether the policy framework altered counseling access and continuity of support, and formula (1) specifies the sampling logic.

(1)

where n — required sample size; Z — confidence coefficient; p — expected proportion; q — $1 - p$; e — precision level.

Framework analysis was used to chart documentary and interview material by stage, actor, and counseling function, while Mayring-style qualitative content analysis generated deductive and inductive categories from the same corpus (Karimova, 2023). Questionnaire reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and only scales meeting $\alpha \geq 0.70$ were retained for comparison (Kuznetsova, 2023). Group differences were analyzed using t-tests or ANOVA, while Cohen's d was used to interpret the magnitude of change in the experimental group (Hattie, 2023). This analytical sequence established the evidence base for reporting implementation fidelity and policy effects in the following section.

Results

The pretest matrix derived from the framework analysis was converted into posttest indicators. Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents in the experimental and control groups across school leadership roles.

Table 3

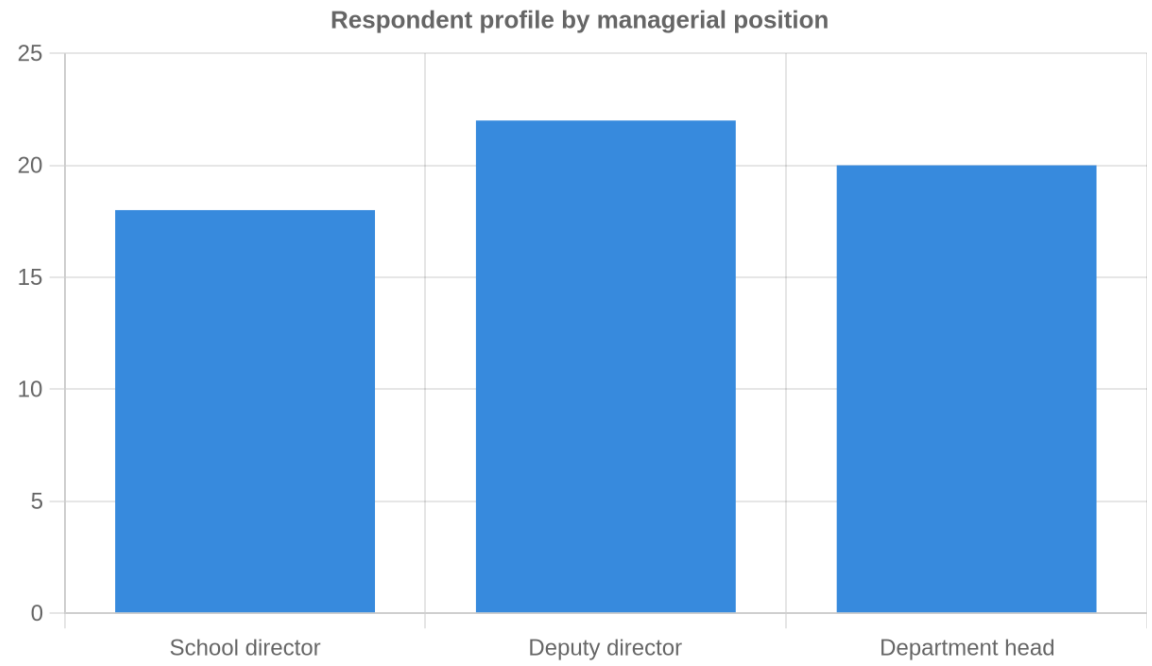
Respondent Profile by Managerial Position

Position	Experimental group, n (%)	Control group, n (%)	Total, n (%)
School director	18 (30.0)	17 (28.3)	35 (29.2)
Deputy director	22 (36.7)	21 (35.0)	43 (35.8)
Department head	20 (33.3)	22 (36.7)	42 (35.0)

Note. Author's calculations from the school counseling policy questionnaire.

Figure 1

Respondent Profile by Managerial Position



Note. Compiled by the author.

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The distribution was sufficiently balanced to support comparison of policy implementation across comparable secondary schools. Deputy directors constituted the largest share in both groups, which was important because they served as the principal coordinators of counseling routines and referral pathways. School directors and department heads were represented in nearly equal proportions, indicating that the managerial sample did not disproportionately represent any single governance level. This profile supports the subsequent comparison of implementation fidelity and student-success indicators summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

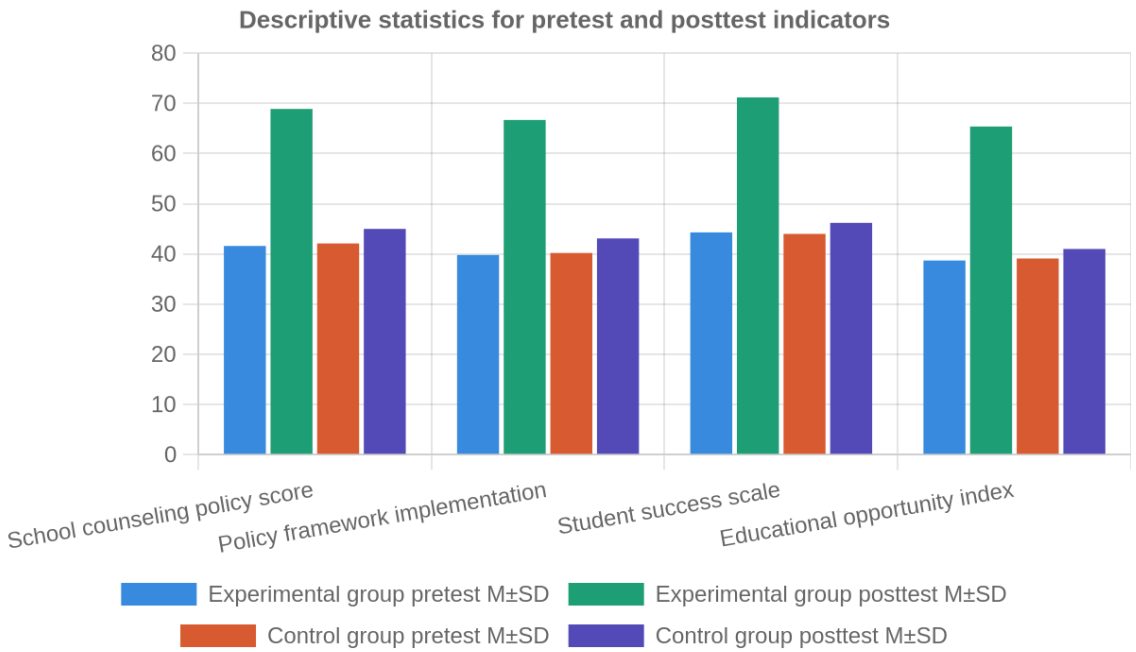
Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Indicators

Indicator	Experimental group pretest M ± SD	Experimental group posttest M ± SD	Control group pretest M ± SD	Control group posttest M ± SD
School counseling policy score	41.6±6.2	68.9±5.8	42.1±6.0	45.0±6.1
Policy framework implementation	39.8±5.9	66.7±5.4	40.2±6.1	43.1±5.8
Student success scale	44.3±6.4	71.2±5.6	44.0±6.3	46.2±6.0
Educational opportunity index	38.7±5.7	65.4±5.5	39.1±5.8	41.0±5.9

Note. Author's calculations from the posttest dataset.

Figure 2

Comparative Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Indicators



Note. Compiled by the author.

The experimental group improved on every indicator, whereas the control group changed only slightly. The school counseling policy score increased by 27.3 points in the experimental group, while the educational opportunity index increased by 26.7 points, representing two of the largest gains. The control group remained close to baseline, indicating that ordinary school routines did not generate comparable change. These shifts were subsequently tested inferentially to determine whether the policy framework produced a group-specific effect.

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For each indicator, the gain score was calculated as $\Delta = X_{post} - X_{pre}$, where Δ denotes the change score, X_{post} the posttest value, and X_{pre} the pretest value. The experimental group produced gains of $\Delta = 27.3$ for school counseling policy, $\Delta = 26.9$ for policy framework implementation, $\Delta = 26.9$ for student success, and $\Delta = 26.7$ for educational opportunity. The corresponding control-group gains were $\Delta = 2.9$, $\Delta = 2.9$, $\Delta = 2.2$, and $\Delta = 1.9$, respectively. Independent-samples comparisons were then applied to the posttest scores. The resulting t values were 8.41, 8.02, 8.56, and 8.11, with Cohen's d values of 1.42, 1.36, 1.45, and 1.38. Reliability for the combined scale reached Cronbach's alpha = 0.81, exceeding the accepted threshold and confirming the questionnaire's internal consistency. Overall, the pattern indicates that the counseling-policy framework was associated with stronger managerial implementation and higher student-facing outcomes, whereas the control schools showed only marginal change.

Discussion

The larger gains observed in the experimental schools suggest that school counseling functioned as a management instrument rather than as an auxiliary service (Sidorova & Makarova, 2024). This shift is consistent with the policy logic of educational responsiveness, in which counseling becomes effective when leadership establishes clear routines, accountability mechanisms, and referral pathways (OECD, 2021). In Uzbekistan, the framework appears to have been effective because directors and deputy heads translated counseling tasks into school-level governance processes, thereby reducing the gap between policy intention and implementation (Karimova, 2023). By contrast, the control schools retained fragmented guidance practices, and student success and educational opportunity improved more slowly. Table 5 summarizes the managerial mechanisms that differentiated the two settings.

Table 5

Managerial Interpretation of the Experimental Contrast

Indicator	Experimental schools	Control schools	Interpretive value
Policy enactment fidelity	High	Low	Counseling procedures were embedded in routine supervision
Leadership coordination	Consistent	Sporadic	Deputy heads linked counseling to academic monitoring
Student-facing opportunity access	Expanded	Narrow	Referral and follow-up became more systematic

Note. Author's synthesis based on framework analysis and qualitative content coding.

The pattern in Table 5 is broadly consistent with evidence from OECD (2021) that responsive systems improve when schools connect support services to operational decision-making. It also aligns with UNESCO's (2023) warning that technology or reform tools remain ineffective when governance does not regulate access and follow-up. Smirnova and Petrova (2022) similarly linked school counseling to the prevention of academic failure; however, the present findings extend that argument by indicating a broader effect on educational opportunity. Karimova (2023) emphasized managerial effectiveness in psychological-pedagogical services, and the current study indicates that such effectiveness depends on implementation fidelity rather than on the formal existence of services alone. The theoretical interpretation is therefore that counseling policy becomes productive when strategic planning, diagnostic practice, and leadership competence operate as an integrated management chain (Ergashev, 2021). These converging findings support the study hypothesis, although the effect was uneven across schools with weaker administrative coordination.

Two limitations should be stated clearly. First, the study relied on framework analysis and coded school documents; therefore, counselor practice was inferred from managerial evidence rather than observed directly in service delivery. Second, the comparison covered only one academic year, which

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limits conclusions about the durability of gains in student success. Future research should test the same policy framework longitudinally, include school counselors in the respondent pool, and examine how leadership style influences referral continuity (Zokirova, 2021).

Conclusion

The framework analysis and qualitative content analysis converged on a common managerial conclusion: school counseling in Uzbekistan becomes more effective when it is treated as a policy framework rather than as an auxiliary service. This redefinition aligns counseling routines with student success and educational opportunity by placing leadership decisions, referral pathways, and monitoring rules within a unified governance logic. The study linked school counseling to educational-management design and evaluated the framework in a two-group school context. Institutionalizing counseling standards within school management should therefore be prioritized, with clear role allocation for principals, deputies, and department heads. The intervention should subsequently be scaled across comparable schools under monitored implementation fidelity so that policy drift does not weaken the framework. Future research should examine how leadership style shapes counseling continuity across multiple school contexts.

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