



Akademik Eğitim ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi (AJESS Journal)

Methods Used by Educational Counsellors to Address Violent Behaviour Among Students

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Article History

Received: 20/12/2025; Accepted : 27/08/2026; Published: 31/08/2026

Abstract

This study aims to identify the methods used by educational counsellors to address violent behaviour among students in the school environment. To achieve this aim, a case study approach was adopted, with interviews serving as the primary data-collection tool. The findings showed that tolerance contributes to rebuilding the personality of students who exhibit violent behaviour by providing psychological and educational support and strengthening their abilities, thereby helping them modify their behaviour and adopt more positive behavioural patterns. The findings also showed that punishment, when applied within a structured educational and guidance framework, can serve to correct behaviour and rehabilitate students, thereby supporting continuity in their educational trajectories and stable academic progress.

Keywords: educational counsellors, school violence, students exhibiting violent behaviour, tolerance, punishment

Introduction

Against a backdrop of social change, educational institutions have witnessed an increasing prevalence of school violence, manifested in bullying, vandalism, insults, verbal abuse, physical assault, and, in extreme cases, homicide. These behaviours are attributed to school-related factors, such as harshness and pressure, as well as external factors, including family problems, social marginalisation, and negative peer influences.

The presence of school violence may hinder the proper functioning of the educational process. It may also damage the institution's reputation and undermine the educational role entrusted to it by society, which seeks to develop individuals capable of contributing to social and economic development. Addressing this educational crisis, which may lead to a range of social problems and harmful consequences, requires concerted efforts by both educational institutions and the broader social structure.

Research Problem

School violence has become a complex educational problem whose seriousness has increased as the phenomenon has spread and become associated with serious offences, particularly at secondary-school level, which coincides with adolescence and the challenges of regulating students' behaviour. Educational administrators therefore employ various administrative and legal procedures to limit it. Educational counsellors are among the key actors in confronting this phenomenon because of their role in implementing pedagogical and administrative measures, maintaining institutional stability, and supporting the success of the educational process. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question:

From educational counsellors' perspectives, which methods are effective in modifying violent behaviour among students who exhibit such behaviour?

Research Subquestions

- What effect do the methods employed by educational counsellors have on the psychological well-being of students who exhibit violent behaviour?
- How do these methods contribute to behavioural correction and educational adjustment?
- What role do the approaches used by educational counsellors play in addressing the family, school, and social factors that influence these students' behaviour?

Hypotheses

- The use of tolerance when dealing with students who exhibit violent behaviour leads to an improvement in their behaviour.
- The use of punishment when dealing with students who exhibit violent behaviour leads to an aggravation of their violent behaviour.

Study Methodology

Research design: The study adopted a descriptive approach to describe and analyse the methods used by educational counsellors when dealing with students who exhibit violent behaviour and to derive findings related to the phenomenon under study.

Data collection: Interviews were used as the research instrument and were conducted with educational counsellors. This enabled participants to express their opinions and experiences freely and provided rich information on the topic, including aspects that may not otherwise have been readily observable.

Research population: The research population comprised all educational counsellors working in secondary schools in Mostaganem Province, for a total of 46.

Study sample: A purposive sample of six educational counsellors was selected not for statistical generalisation, but to gain an in-depth understanding of the methods they use when dealing with students who exhibit violent behaviour and to obtain qualitative data reflecting the diversity of practices within the school environment.

Research Objectives

The study aims to identify the factors associated with violence among secondary-school students from the perspective of educational counsellors, determine the nature of counsellors' relationships with students who exhibit violent behaviour and the extent to which these relationships influence behavioural modification, and evaluate the effectiveness of the methods adopted by counsellors in addressing violence and their effects on students' behaviour.

Study Concepts

Educational Counsellor

An educational counsellor is defined as a professional responsible for providing counselling and guidance, correcting students' behaviour, and helping them overcome difficulties and behavioural deviations. The educational counsellor also serves as a link with the teaching staff because of their familiarity with students' problems, contributes to maintaining order and appropriate conduct within the educational institution, and prepares daily reports concerning students and teachers (Dabbab, 2013, p. 133).

Violence

Violence is defined in Al-Qamus al-Muhit, Mukhtar al-Sihah, and Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit as the opposite of gentleness and leniency and is associated with severity, harshness, blame, and forceful expression.

Lexicographical definitions agree that violence is the opposite of gentleness and leniency and is associated with severity, harshness, and force. It may also take the form of blame and verbal reprimand. Violence is therefore manifested in an individual's behaviour through either speech or actions (Mansour, 2019, p. 28).

The Larousse Dictionary defines violence as behaviour characterised by force, severity, harshness, and aggression. It may be manifested in speech or actions and is also associated with intolerance and the use of physical force or weapons. The definition further encompasses compulsion, coercion, and the imposition of will by force (Ma'touq, 2017, p. 14).

Clark defines violence as an action carried out by a powerful group against a powerless group. In terminological terms, violence refers to the unlawful use of force or pressure to influence an individual's will and compel that individual, thereby depriving them of freedom of choice. From a legal perspective, coercion renders a contract invalid because it is absent freedom of will (Salam, 2012, p. 27).

School Violence

Ahmed Houiti defines school violence as violent behaviours committed by students against their peers, teachers, or the school that negatively affect order and academic achievement. These behaviours include physical violence, such as hitting, vandalism, and assault, as well as non-physical violence, such as insults, verbal abuse, ridicule, disobedience, and the creation of disorder (Cherifi, 2016, p. 64).

Jovan considers interpersonal school violence to have been studied primarily through students' aggressive behaviours, drawing on legal classifications and criminological and behavioural studies. Approaches to the phenomenon differ across countries. In France, school violence is linked to the overlapping roles of the Ministries of Education, Justice, and the

Interior, whereas in Canada it is classified mainly within behavioural disorders. This difference helps explain variations in estimates of the phenomenon between the two countries (Mahjoub et al., 2011, pp. 15–17).

School violence is a multidimensional educational and social phenomenon that includes both non-physical and physical violence, with psychological, material, and cultural factors interacting in its emergence. Its interpretation and classification also vary across countries according to their legal and educational frameworks.

School Tolerance

Tolerance is defined as an attitude characterised by acceptance and understanding of others and respect for their ideas and opinions, whether these views agree with or differ from one's own. It reflects broad-mindedness and a willingness to understand others (Al-Anzi & Al-Matrudi, 2023, p. 1407).

Tolerance is an orientation grounded in beliefs and ideas that value and respect difference and diversity. It is also fundamentally based on feelings of love, affection, and preference towards other groups (Al-Dhahli & Zahtout, 2022, p. 123).

School tolerance can therefore be understood as an educational approach that promotes mutual respect, understanding, and effective communication among students while encouraging dialogue, attentiveness to others' needs, and a spirit of tolerance.

School Punishment

School punishment is defined as a set of measures taken by an educational institution towards students who violate its regulations, with the aims of deterring misconduct, correcting behaviour, and reinforcing respect for order. Such punishments include verbal measures, such as reprimands and rebukes, as well as other measures, such as repeating an assignment, suspension, cleaning the institution, or physical punishment (Al-Ghadban Belqaid, 2015, p. 52).

Fieldwork Context

The scope and boundaries of the study were as follows:

- Participant scope: Educational counsellors working in secondary schools.
- Geographical scope: Selected secondary schools in Mostaganem Province.
- Temporal scope: February 2024.

Table 1: Tolerance-Based Methods Reported by the Research Sample

Tolerance-based method	Frequency	Percentage
Calming	5	20.84%
Dialogue	5	20.84%
Attention	4	16.66%
Guidance and counselling	4	16.66%
Contacting the parent or guardian	6	25.00%
Total	24	100.00%

Note. Prepared by the researcher based on field interviews with educational counsellors, 2024.

Presentation and Discussion of Results

The field data revealed the methods used by educational counsellors when dealing with students who exhibit violent behaviour.

Tolerance Method

Initially, the educational counsellor summons and calms the student, opens a dialogue, and allows the student to speak and explain or justify the violent actions and behaviours committed. This is reflected in the participants' statements: M1, "We calm the student and take the student's psychological state into account"; M3, "We calm the student and talk with the student so that the student can tell us everything on their mind, enabling us to identify the reason for the violent behaviour"; M4, "The counsellor must conceal anger and concern about the mistake committed by the student; instead, the student should be calmed and prepared for dialogue"; and M5, "Sometimes we calm the situation between the teacher and the student, or between the student's parent and the teacher, so that the matter does not get out of control."

M6 stated, "The first thing I do is summon the student, talk with the student, and discuss the matter." Dialogue enables counsellors to establish closer contact with students who exhibit violent behaviour, understand their personalities and social environments, and identify the factors that led to the violent act. It also helps students recognise the educational institution's standards and values. Dialogue is a method of exchanging information, knowledge, and ideas through discussion, understanding, and reason while avoiding racism, intolerance, insularity, and superiority and respecting others' right to express their opinions, experiences, and expertise (Al-Saeed, 2014, p. 258).

This culture falls within the framework of educational dialogue, which consists of communication and interaction among educational actors, students, teachers, and the institution's administrative staff concerning the functional aspects of various educational issues within the secondary education institution. Its purpose is to provide appropriate conditions for teaching and learning and to overcome difficulties that impede these processes (Goumedi, 2019, p. 128).

Educational counsellors also consider the social factors students experience outside the educational institution so they can respond appropriately. This is reflected in the participants' statements: M1, "Pay attention to the student's family and social situation, and inform the teachers about it so that they deal with the student correctly and appropriately"; M2, "Pay attention to the living and family circumstances of the violent student"; M4, "Pay attention to the student's social circumstances so that the student can be dealt with in a particular manner"; and M6, "Pay attention to the family and social causes affecting the violent student."

Family and social environments are among the most prominent factors contributing to the emergence of violence among students as a result of family breakdown, low income, authoritarian and inconsistent parenting practices, poverty, marginalisation, and negative peer influences. Taken together, these circumstances may place students under pressure and contribute to aggressive and violent behaviour. This supports M4's emphasis on the importance of alleviating psychological pressure before engaging the student in dialogue and listening, because pressures arising from surrounding circumstances may lead to tension, distress, and poor adjustment, particularly when individuals feel unable to meet the demands placed upon them (Al-Sayed Shalabi, 2020, p. 315).

Difficult social circumstances may negatively affect students' behaviour and thinking, potentially leading to unethical or atypical behaviour. Such behaviour may include assaulting others, drug use, and property damage, all of which constitute violations of the social values and norms of the students' community. Educational counsellors are responsible for guiding, counselling, and advising students, as reflected in the participants' statements. M2 stated, "Summon the violent student to the office to provide advice and guidance ..."; M4 stated, "Give the student similar examples of violent acts committed by others so that the student can overcome the problem and avoid punishment ... I aim to protect the student from making another mistake"; M5 stated, "Guide and counsel the violent student and inform the student that these behaviours will affect the student's academic pathway and reputation inside and outside the educational institution"; and M6 stated, "After talking with the student, I offer advice that encourages the student to like studying so that the student can improve academic performance."

Guidance and counselling are processes aimed at developing students' abilities and skills, strengthening their self-confidence, and supporting the achievement of academic and personal goals, while taking into account their individual abilities and family and social circumstances to ensure appropriate guidance.

Another tolerance-based method used by educational counsellors is contacting the student's parent or guardian, a practice reported by all participants. M1 and M2 stated, "Summon the student's parent in an attempt to understand the reason for the student's violence"; M3 stated, "Seek the assistance of students' parents to help us solve the problems caused by their children"; M4 stated, "Contact the student's parent and talk with them to identify the problem or reason that led the child to commit violence"; M5 stated, "Summon the student's parent to reveal the circumstances that led the child to commit violent acts and behaviours, because the student may falsify the truth and events"; and M6 stated, "We summon the student's parent and ask the parent to follow up on the child in terms of violent behaviours and academic achievement." Communication between the educational institution and the family is therefore a cooperative and complementary process aimed at supporting student success. In the context of contemporary educational demands, the family's role has become increasingly important, particularly amid changes affecting modern educational systems.

Family groups in schools have also emerged as an approach that involves parents and the community in the educational process to support students' success and improve performance. This occurs through families' assistance to their children at home and their cooperation with the school, making the family's role complementary to that of the school (Yahiaoui, 2018, pp. 6–7).

The tolerance method used by educational counsellors contributes to rebuilding the personality of students who exhibit violent behaviour and restoring their abilities. According to M3, "We use tolerance with the aim of winning the student over and rebuilding the student psychologically and intellectually." This approach is intended to promote psychological adjustment and effective adaptation within the educational environment. Such adjustment is considered an outcome of comprehensive education that addresses psychological, social, and educational dimensions by refining behaviour, supporting academic and practical development, and fostering cognitive and emotional growth.

Educational counsellors seek to provide a supportive educational environment for students who exhibit violent behaviour by integrating them into the class group and strengthening their sense of belonging and citizenship, thereby promoting the social and educational integration necessary for successful continuation of their studies. According to M3, "We try to reintegrate the student into the classroom after showing attention and gaining the student's affection." M6 also stated, "We do not leave the violent student alone; rather, we accompany the student psychologically and socially so that the student feels cared for, which makes integration with classmates easier." Integration refers to an individual becoming part of the group or society to which they belong, developing a sense of belonging and adjustment and accepting the norms, values, and beliefs that support social adaptation. For Durkheim, education helps individuals become aware of and organise the social self to avoid conflict with personal needs. He considers this process to occur through moral education, understood as the internalisation of society's fundamental values and beliefs through socialisation (Abdelghani, 2017, p. 43).

The percentages presented in Table 1 suggest that some educational counsellors may conflate emotional considerations with professional duties. This finding highlights the need to address violent behaviour in accordance with educational laws and regulations while maintaining a professional distance that safeguards the institution's authority and function. Students should also be regarded as individuals in need of educational guidance and support, while the distinct roles of the school, the family, and the wider social environment are maintained.

Punishment Method

When a student exceeds the limits of acceptable behaviour, the educational and administrative team resorts to progressive disciplinary measures to restore behavioural control and maintain order. The procedures begin with referral to the listening unit, where the student is heard in the presence of the unit members and the parent or guardian, who signs a commitment concerning the student's discipline. If the violation is repeated, the student's file is referred to the disciplinary council to determine the appropriate sanction, in accordance with the type of offence and Decision No. 73 dated 12 July 2018. The following are examples of offences and their corresponding sanctions:

First-degree offences include repeated lateness, disruption of the proper conduct of a lesson, or failure to wear attire appropriate to the student's status. Sanctions include:

- A verbal warning.
- Summoning the student's parent or guardian so that they are informed of the student's offences.
- A written warning or written notice of reprimand, with one copy sent to the parent or guardian and another retained in the student's file.

Second-degree offences include repeated absence, possession or consumption of tobacco products, or damage to the institution's property. Sanctions include:

- Requiring the student to provide material or financial compensation for damaged items.
- Assigning service work within the institution, such as cleaning the courtyard or painting a wall.

Third-degree offences include committing violence in any form, cheating in examinations, using technological devices for non-educational purposes, or bringing fireworks, bladed weapons, or sharp objects onto school premises. Sanctions include:

- Depriving the student of either catering or boarding arrangements.
- Depriving the student of the right to repeat the year in the event of failure.
- Transferring the student from the current institution to another institution.

The administrative procedures applied by educational counsellors towards students who exhibit violent behaviour form part of the organisational culture of the educational institution, which comprises a set of values, beliefs, symbols, and practices that influence individuals' behaviour and contribute to a shared understanding of the conduct expected within the institution (Khalidia et al., 2019, p. 70). School organisational culture, therefore, refers to the values, standards, customs, and rules shared among staff that contribute to effective management and the achievement of educational objectives. The punishment method used by educational counsellors aims to discipline students and correct behaviour rather than oppress them or deprive them of learning, thereby helping them recognise and correct their mistakes and continue their educational trajectories successfully.

Conclusion

Dealing with students who exhibit violent behaviour requires balanced educational skills that combine tolerance and punishment. Tolerance helps counsellors understand the causes of violent behaviour, reduce tension, and build a positive relationship with the student, whereas punishment should be used cautiously for correction and discipline and should not become a means of oppression or of depriving the student of learning.

The study concluded that effective dialogue is an essential means of establishing closer contact with students, understanding their personalities and social circumstances, and helping them recognise the institution's values and rules. Consideration of the family and social factors and psychological pressures experienced by students is necessary to understand the causes of violence and address them effectively. Guidance and counselling also help raise students' awareness and support them in making appropriate decisions regarding their academic and personal pathways.

The findings showed that tolerance contributes to rebuilding students' personalities and strengthening their abilities; however, excessive tolerance may weaken the institution's regulatory function. Punishment, by contrast, can serve as a means of discipline, correction, and behavioural adjustment, enabling students to continue their educational trajectories successfully.

The study recommends strengthening students' awareness of their rights and duties, increasing cultural, recreational, sporting, and scientific activities, organising exploratory trips, and encouraging participation in charitable work and community service in ways that promote cooperation, solidarity, and responsibility and reduce violent behaviour.

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