



# Understanding the Gaps of Guidance and Counseling through the Lens of School Guidance Advocates

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**Abstract**— This phenomenological study explored the experiences of guidance advocates in the execution of their guidance and counseling duties in the public secondary schools of Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. Furthermore, this investigated their coping strategies and insights that were derived from their experiences drawn from the findings of this study. Qualitative – phenomenological study was employed in exploring the views of the ten participants of which primary instrument of data gathering was through in- depth interview. After analyzing the responses of the participants about their experiences as guidance advocates in guidance and counseling, the following three themes emerged: experiencing difficulty in adjusting as designate guidance advocate, adapting to responsibility, and struggling to complete tasks. Further, on the participants' coping mechanisms of guidance advocates in guidance and counseling, the following three themes emerged: focusing on helping the learners, adapting various strategies to improve guidance services, and collaborating with other guidance advocates. Finally, after analyzing the responses of the participants about the insights of guidance advocates drawn from the findings of the study, the following three themes emerged: giving importance to teachers' trainings and seminars, implementing programs and activities for students, and providing needed facilities. It implies that students are provided with guidance and counseling services in order to help them find answers to psychological issues that may be interfering with their academic performance. The pupils are able to build abilities in problem-solving through the application of this method, which in some ways assists them in dealing with certain challenges surrounding their life. It was absolutely necessary to direct students to exhibit acceptable attitude and behavior within and outside the school.

**Index Terms**— guidance and counseling, school guidance advocates, phenomenology, Davao Oriental, Philippines.

## 1. Introduction

Students now have access to guidance and counseling services in public primary schools run by the Department of Education (DepEd), which will assist them in developing emotionally, intellectually, and socially. Because there has been so little study done on the topic, the usefulness of these programs has been called into doubt.

Even while resources such as workshops, reading materials, motivational speakers, family gatherings, and motivational

counselors were all accessible in Kenya, they were not sufficient. A lack of specified time allocation, poor facilities, a lack of collaboration from students, and a lack of cooperation from parents were among the several obstacles that hindered the successful execution of the guidance and counseling program (Warui, 2018).

In addition, difficulties relating to mental health, a sense of isolation, an excessive number of obligations, and an inconsistent internet connection were the primary concerns of both the educators and the students in the Philippines. In order to address them, they improved the homeroom and guidance period, performed mental health activities, gave individual and group therapy, talked with the parents, worked more closely with the class advisers, teachers, and academic leaders, and held individual counseling sessions (Arrieta & Valeria, 2021).

In the same vein, guidance advocates and counsellors in the Banaybanay District of the Davao Oriental Division face the same dilemma as was mentioned before. They have suffered as a result of a lack of appropriate trainings, a lack of budget, and time restrictions caused by job. There is a pressing need to have a deeper understanding of this present problem and to locate potential solutions that guidance advocates and counselors can implement.

The researcher has not come across a study that focuses on the experiences of guidance advocates and counsellors working in the local environment about the implementation of guidance and counseling programs in the school. Since this study is relevant to the administrative committee of the Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental, the researcher is eager to understand the journey of guidance advocates and the significant factors on their experiences in the implementation of various guidance and counseling activities or programs. This is because this study provides relevance to the committee.

In addition, the outcomes of this research, which were derived from the participants' own experiences, realizations, and newly acquired insights, will serve as the basis for improvements to be made to the guidance and counseling program for the subsequent school years. This research has the potential to yield insights that are crucial to educational management in the context of the Banaybanay District, which

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is located within the Davao Oriental Division. These insights may be derived from the lessons that the participants have learned from their own experiences.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of guidance advocates in the execution of their guidance and counseling duties in the public secondary schools of Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. Furthermore, this investigated their coping strategies and insights that were derived from their experiences drawn from the findings of this study.

At this stage of research, the experiences of guidance advocates were generally defined as their learning as well as challenging experiences in implementing guidance and counseling in public secondary schools at Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental.

### *Research Questions:*

This research was designed to explore the experiences of guidance advocates in the execution of their guidance and counseling duties in public secondary schools. This study specifically aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of guidance advocates in guidance and counseling?
2. How do guidance advocates cope with the challenges in guidance and counseling?
3. What are insights of guidance advocates drawn from the findings of the study?

## 3. Methods

This endeavor was carried out using a qualitative approach, utilizing a phenomenological methodology. In this study, I used the approach of Creswell (2015) to explore the lived experiences of several individuals who have a common understanding or experience of a certain event via phenomenological research. Given this, I had a strong belief that classifying a phenomena as a study design may be the most suitable approach for doing my research. In addition, I added my own unique touch by creating tables that outline the extent of my data collection and the challenges that needed to be resolved from the views of guidance advocates on guidance and counseling in schools. Ultimately, I ended the research by adding an epilogue that integrated my own experiences into the narrative of the study. Regarding the previous topic of insights, I advocated for this study as being both pragmatic and advantageous for my audience, including the Department of Education, school administrators, and public-school educators.

I followed some criteria in selecting the participants such as: (1) the participants must be holding a permanent teaching position as Teacher I in the secondary level; (2) the participants were assigned as a guidance advocate; and (3) these teachers had experienced various struggles or challenges in conducting guidance and counseling programs in the school. Further, they were composed of either male or female participants who were willing to participate in this study. Additionally, the participants were for in-depth interview and that this number was already

enough to provide information with regards to the opportunity to identify and generate the themes characterized by phenomenological research.

In analyzing the data, I followed tradition in managing, reading, miming, describing, categorizing, interpreting, representing, and displaying data for data analysis. As for data management, I created and organized files of data gathered through interviews, recorded notes, articles from online journals, and books; as for reading and memoing, I read through the transcribed texts, made marginal notes, and formed initial codes; as for describing, I described the case and its context; as for classifying, I used categorical aggregation and established patterns of categories; and as for interpreting, I used direct interpretation.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### *A. Experiences of Guidance Advocates in Guidance and Counseling*

After analyzing the responses of the participants about their experiences as guidance advocates in guidance and counseling, the following three (3) themes emerged: experiencing difficulty in adjusting, adapting to responsibility given, and struggling to complete tasks.

#### *1) Experiencing Difficulty in Adjusting as Designate Guidance Advocate*

As designated School Guidance Advocates are mostly, if not all, teachers who are designated to be guidance advocates in schools to address the need for each school with no personal guidance counselor. Based on the responses of the participants, they are trained to be teachers, but they have to perform the duties and functions of guidance counselors in the absence of one, which makes it difficult for them, especially at first.

In line with this, guidance and counseling services are important aspects of the school system. Counseling services are not just for students who are involved in disciplinary issues, but also for the positive development of individuals. Counseling is a professional relationship involving two or more individuals in which a counselor helps clients in adjusting or solving their personal issues. Coleman (2019) stresses that there has been no generally accepted definition on counseling for years. According to the 20/20 vision for the future of counseling group lead by Kaplan and others, counseling is defined as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (Gysbers, 2016).

Also, Akinade (2012) defines guidance and counselling as a process of helping an individual become fully aware of his/herself and the ways in which he is responding to the influences of his/her environment. It further assists him to establish some personal meaning for this behaviour and to develop and classify a set of goals and values for future behaviour. According to Oviogbodu (2015) counselling can be defined as a number of procedures in assisting an individual to solve his problems. Counselling is more involved emotionally in the affective realm of personalized learning, that is, emotions and feelings, values, attitudes. Counselling is an interaction or

relationship between two or few individuals, the client counsellor relationship of trust.

### 2) *Adapting to Responsibility*

As a Guidance Advocate, participants also experienced having to adapt to the new responsibility given to them. Though this experience is something that they were not prepared to encounter, they shared how they maximized their efforts in making sure that they were able to perform the responsibilities assigned to them with the best of their abilities.

Based on data. 'Directive counselling' is the method most commonly used by counsellors in school settings (Coleman, 2019). Directive counselling seems to be most successful when the counselee is relatively well adjusted, the problem is in an intellectual area, a lack of information constituted the problem, the counselee has little insight into the problem, inner conflict is absent, and the client suffers from anxiety, insecurity, or impatience (Parsons, 2019).

Counseling students becomes difficult without face-to-face courses, and there is no evidence that online counseling is advantageous. Due to the lack of personal touch, online therapy is often seen as less effective (Villarreal-Davis, Sartor, & McLean, 2020). Due to the fact that children are at home and have less physical interaction with classmates and friends, guidance counselors were uncertain how to ensure their cognitive, emotional, and psychological well-being.

### 3) *Struggling to Complete New Tasks*

This theme reflected the participants' dilemma in being able to complete tasks and functions given to them because they perceive this as complicated knowing that they do not have enough preparation to be guidance advocates.

Counselors also provide counseling services and support to parents in schools. In several cases, counselors act as consultants to parents on how to deal with their children's behavior. School counselors have information about issues and challenges students face in school. Nevertheless, counselors are not supposed to share this information directly to other teachers due to confidentiality issues. However, counselors can share certain information with teachers when it helps the students. For example, counselors can remind teachers that there are several students in the school that need more personal attention due to family problems or sharing with the teacher personalities issues of the students. Counseling sessions will only succeed when the student receives full support from the whole system. Counselors can also discuss with teachers concerning personality and career choices of students. Therefore, when they teach, they can also connect suitable career choices with their students' personalities (Kaplan *et al.*, 2014).

Also, counselling is a process. It means that Counselling involves a sequence of identifiable events spread over a period of time. The time taken, the sequence of events, and dynamics involved, the nature and extent of exploration, differ from individual to individual. However, there are certain basic stages, which form the essentials of counselling processes. The guidance and counselling program is an integral part of a school's total educational program. It is developmental by design, focusing on needs, interests, and issues related to various stages of student growth. It is the process by which

students are given advice on how to deal with emotional conflicts and personal problems both in school and how to incorporate the same in their daily life. Some sessions involve career guidance where students are advised on which courses to do and which jobs to expect when one does a particular course (Amla *et al.*, 2020).

## B. *Coping Mechanisms of Guidance Advocates in Guidance and Counseling*

After analyzing the responses of the participants about the coping mechanisms of guidance advocates in guidance and counseling, the following three themes emerged: focusing on helping the learners, adapting various strategies to improve guidance services, and collaborating with other guidance advocates.

### 1) *Focusing on Helping the Learners*

This theme displays one of the strategies that guidance advocates utilized in order to cope with the challenges they encountered in guidance and counseling which is to focus in helping the learners which, in turn, would help them to constantly become motivated in performing their duties and responsibilities as guidance advocates despite how challenging it may be.

During physical education courses, mental health-related problems are one of the most prevalent topics addressed by guidance counselors. Physically present counseling of adolescents suffering anxiety and sadness is plainly helpful. The use of other sources of communication, such as mobile phones and the internet, is a complement for monitoring the students' situation. This is reinforced by research indicating that giving online counseling in addition to face-to-face services might be an effective strategy for many university counseling centers to enhance service use and so better serve their communities (Wong *et al.*, 2018).

Counselling is a learning process in which a counsellor helps an individual, or individuals learn, understand themselves and their environment, and be able to choose the type of behaviours that will help them develop, grow, progress, ascend, mature, and advance educationally, professionally, and personally (Egbo, 2013). In other words, counseling is a transforming process that aids in the acquisition of all knowledge, both inside and outside the classroom.

Students are better able to comprehend and accept the outcomes of their actions as a consequence of guidance and counseling services at school. In the school systems of industrialized countries, guidance and counseling are effectively implemented. Schools' guidance and counseling services give students with an excellent chance to meet the challenges of academic and personal growth (Neyland-Brown, *et al.*, 2019).

### 2) *Adapting Various Strategies to Improve Guidance Services*

Another strategy that was shared by the participants on how they were able to cope with the challenges they encountered in guidance and counseling is not limiting themselves with only one strategy to adapt but by adapting various strategies and assessing which of these strategies improve guidance services the most.

Guidance has a responsibility for developing and maintaining a cooperative relationship between students and the school. Teachers and counsellors must be cognizant of students' needs. Students also must make adjustments to the school. They have a responsibility to contribute something to the school. A major contribution of students is that of making appropriate use of the school's resources and working toward accomplishments. Such mutual adjustment of students and school is facilitated by providing suggestions for program improvements, conducting research for educational improvements, contributing to students' adjustment through counselling, and fostering wholesome school home attitudes (Touron et al., 2015).

The implementation of counseling services for students by school counselors makes use of technological media as an aspect of enhancing the professional competence of school counselors. This is being done in order to improve the counseling services that are provided for students. Teachers who are professionally trained in guidance and counseling are able to organize, carry out, and assess their own usage of technology and media in counseling services (Supriyanto et al., 2020).

### 3) Collaborating with Guidance Advocates

Another thing that made most of the guidance advocate-participants cope with the challenges they encounter is knowing when to ask assistance from others especially if the task and responsibilities given to them is too much for them and have made them confused.

In addition, by building processes and collaborating with department heads, teacher counselors anticipated these challenges. The only synchronous lessons were homeroom and counseling. According to study, a school leadership team might have an impact. Using this strategy, school counselors may assist students in the classroom. Using the evidence-based school counseling approach and collaborating with the school leadership team, a school counselor may administer a comprehensive school counseling program that better meets the needs of all students (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020).

They discovered that communication between academic heads, class advisers, and teachers is more transparent and collaborative for the students' benefit. They may present and discuss student issues and concerns with teachers, particularly class advisers, resulting in the implementation of suitable measures. As a consequence, collaboration and counseling are enhanced. Cooperation between principals and counselors results in less staff turnover, happier employees, and more effective school counseling programs. This collaboration is advantageous for students, faculty, and the institution as a whole (McConnell, 2021).

### C. Insights of Guidance Advocates Drawn from the Findings of the Study

After analyzing the responses of the participants about the insights of guidance advocates drawn from the findings of the study, the following three (3) themes emerged: giving importance to trainings and seminars, implementing programs and activities for students, and providing needed facilities.

#### 1) Giving Importance to Teachers' Trainings and Seminars

Most of the participants shared how they longed for training and seminars that may enhance and develop their skills in providing guidance and counseling services in schools.

Mortomore (2014) suggests that school guidance and counseling programs should involve the whole teaching staff. Coordination, collaboration, and consultation are required. Each staff member should be charged with guaranteeing the success of the program as part of the program's collaborative approach. However, teachers are overburdened with the responsibilities entrusted to them, necessitating support from head teachers in the form of recruitment of additional teachers to assist in relieving school heads of some teaching burden so that they can have more contact hours with adolescent student clients.

According to the findings of a recent study, the future of the counseling profession will include the formal and widespread integration of official training in technical skills training into the curriculum. In spite of the fact that the academic core curriculum areas are comparable in both contexts, telehealth is fast transforming the essential skills for counselors to include electronic communication, documentation, and billing (Haddock et al., 2020).

#### 2) Implementing Programs and Activities for Students

One of the major responsibilities of guidance advocates is to facilitate programs and activities that would be of great help to students. As shared by some of the participants, being a guidance advocate requires that they be able to perform this kind of duty and function for the benefit of the learners.

Generally, school counselors help students for academic, career and social issues by relating educational agendas to their success in the future. Counselors will stimulate student motivation in their learning and facilitate students in achieving their ambitions through career development programs. Most importantly, counselors help students deal with any psychological or emotional issues they may face, whether at school or at home. This can be done through individual counseling. In addition, if there is a problem involving several students, a group counseling session can be arranged to help the students involved. In some cases, parents will be called to the school to help counselors deal with specific issues involving their child's behavior (Popham, 2015).

Also, school counselors provide counseling programs in areas such as academic, personal development, career, and drug prevention programs. Other than focusing on academic and career issues, counseling and guidance services in schools help students resolve emotional and personal issues or behavioral problems. In some cases, family counseling can also be conducted when the counselor assumes the problem to stem from home. Counseling services help students develop a clearer focus or sense of direction in their life. Therefore, effective counseling programs are essential to the school system to provide a conducive learning environment that will improve student achievement (Heyden, 2021).

#### 3) Providing Needed Facilities

One of the sentiments or insights shared by the guidance advocate participants is on how significant being given with

their needed facilities is in order for them to maximize their facilitation of guidance and counseling services.

the provision of effective guiding and counseling services requires enough resources and equipment (Lehr, 2012). Private counseling and resource rooms are required for efficient guiding and counseling services. In many instances, academic facilities and resources will be prioritized. As a secondary curriculum, guidance and counseling will be challenged. The rising number of students in schools also indicates that the facilities are overcrowded and hence inadequate (Kilonzo, 2013). This study examined the allocation of school resources and facilities for academic and counseling purposes.

Moreover, the majority of secondary school students never attend guidance and counseling offices, according to research. The mean perception score of students and teachers about the utility of the service was good, despite the provision being very restricted or unavailable most of the time. The services of guidance and counseling are also affected by a number of obstacles, such as a dearth of counselors with professional training and the absence of necessary facilities (Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020).

## 5. Implications and Future Directions

### A. Implications

One of the most significant advantages of guidance and counseling in schools provided by a school counselor who is both well-trained and effective is the possibility that they will be able to assist students in becoming better prepared for academic, professional, and social challenges. This can be accomplished by relating the students' academic success with the potential success of their future lives.

It implies that students are provided with guidance and counseling services in order to help them find answers to psychological issues that may be interfering with their academic performance. The pupils are able to build abilities in problem-solving through the application of this method, which in some ways assists them in dealing with certain challenges surrounding their life.

The main goal of guidance and counseling in schools is to provide the means for the students to acquire a deeper awareness of themselves and the ability to adapt their behavior in order to better deal with the challenges they face in their lives. This will be accomplished by encouraging the students to arrive at their own assumptions and to put those conclusions into practice in order to build a life that is more fulfilling.

Likewise, guidance and counselling services in schools are thought to help establish, assess, and improve educational programmes, as well as improve teaching, teacher competence and lower expenses for students. It was absolutely necessary to direct students to exhibit acceptable attitude and behavior within and outside the school.

The main goal of guidance and counseling is to help teachers and students understand themselves so they can deal with life in a healthy way. This means being able to identify the things that cause problems and look for healthy ways to deal with or avoid the things that could lead to unhealthy lifestyles.

### B. Future Directions of the Study

Future directions in the study of guidance and counseling in schools are poised to address the evolving challenges and diverse needs of students in a rapidly changing world. With advancements in technology, there is a growing emphasis on integrating digital tools and platforms to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of counseling services. Additionally, there is a need to focus on culturally responsive practices to cater to increasingly diverse student populations. Research is also likely to explore the impact of mental health on academic performance, necessitating more holistic approaches to student well-being. Furthermore, the development of evidence-based strategies for early intervention and the promotion of resilience and life skills will be crucial. Ultimately, the aim is to create more supportive, inclusive, and adaptive educational environments that foster both academic success and personal growth.

*Department of Education:* Future studies will focus on policy development to integrate digital counseling tools, culturally responsive practices, and comprehensive mental health programs into school systems to enhance student support services.

*School Principals:* Research will explore effective leadership strategies for implementing innovative guidance programs, fostering inclusive school environments, and promoting mental health awareness among staff and students.

*Teachers:* Future directions include training on identifying and addressing student mental health issues, integrating social-emotional learning in the curriculum, and collaborating with counselors to support diverse student needs.

*Guidance Advocates:* Studies will emphasize advocating for increased resources, professional development opportunities, and the implementation of evidence-based counseling practices to improve student outcomes and well-being.

*Future Researchers:* Research will focus on evaluating the effectiveness of new counseling interventions, understanding the impact of socio-cultural factors on student mental health, and developing scalable models for school-based mental health services.

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