

## 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.

**Keywords:** guidance and counseling, school guidance advocates, phenomenology, Davao Oriental, Philippines

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Challenges and Strategies in Guidance and Counseling Programs in Public Secondary Schools

Guidance and counseling services in public schools are essential for the emotional, intellectual, and social development of students. However, the effectiveness of these programs often comes into question due to various challenges faced by guidance advocates. This study aims to explore the experiences of guidance advocates, focusing on the difficulties they encounter and their strategies for overcoming these challenges.

#### Guidance Services

Guidance and counseling services are designed to help students understand themselves and their environment better, fostering academic and personal growth. Akinade (2012) defines guidance and counseling as a process that helps individuals become fully aware of themselves and their responses to environmental influences. Similarly, Oviogbodu (2015) describes counseling as a set of procedures that assist individuals in solving their problems, emphasizing the emotional and affective aspects of learning.

The goals of guidance and counseling services include helping students meet their physiological needs, develop relationships, balance permissiveness and control in school, achieve academic success, and gain independence (Heyden, 2015). Oketch (2015) adds that learning involves acquiring new behaviors, knowledge, skills, and cultural perspectives, leading to changes in thoughts, routines, and emotions.

Effective guidance and counseling services are crucial for students' academic performance, conduct, and overall well-being. Schools' guidance and counseling services provide students with opportunities to meet academic and personal growth challenges (Neyland-Brown et al., 2019). However, high-stakes testing and administrative distractions often hinder the primary mission of school counselors, which is to support students' mental health needs.

#### Challenges Encountered by Teacher Counselors

##### Lack of Formal Training

Traditionally, teachers have offered educational guidance and counseling without formal training, relying on experience, age, and wisdom. However, the complexities of modern child behavior management require formal training. Research shows that a lack of training and skills is a significant obstacle to effective guidance and counseling (Bernard, 2002; Chepkirui, 2011).

#### Teacher Counselors' Workload

Teacher counselors often face heavy workloads, balancing academic responsibilities with counseling duties. This dual role can lead to insufficient time for counseling, as academic tasks are often prioritized (Arudo, 2008; Chepkirui, 2011). Additionally, the increasing student population exacerbates this issue, with teachers struggling to meet the needs of all students (Wambui, 2011).

#### Inadequate Resources

Effective guidance and counseling require adequate resources and facilities, such as private counseling rooms and sufficient materials. However, academic facilities often take precedence, leading to inadequate support for counseling services (Lehr, 2012). Overcrowded facilities further challenge the provision of effective guidance and counseling (Kilonzo, 2013).

#### Mental Health Problems

Mental health issues among students, such as anxiety and depression, are prevalent topics addressed by guidance counselors. The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues, leading to increased online fatigue and emotional stress for both students and counselors (Villarreal-Davis, Sartor, & McLean, 2020). The lack of face-to-face interaction poses challenges for effective counseling, highlighting the need for comprehensive mental health support.

#### Strategies Adopted in Improving Guidance and Counseling in Schools

Despite the challenges, several strategies can enhance the effectiveness of guidance and counseling programs:

##### Professional Training and Development

Ensuring that teacher counselors receive formal training in guidance and counseling is crucial. Programs should equip counselors with the necessary skills and knowledge to address students' needs effectively (UNESCO, 2020). Continuous professional development, including mentoring and online forums, can further support counselors in their roles (Trust & Whalen, 2020).

##### Resource Allocation

Schools must prioritize the allocation of resources for guidance and counseling services. This includes providing private counseling rooms, adequate materials, and reducing counselor workloads to allow more time for counseling activities (Lehr, 2012). Effective resource allocation can significantly improve the quality of guidance and counseling services.

##### Collaborative Approaches

Collaboration between counselors, teachers, and school administrators is essential for successful guidance and counseling programs. Regular meetings and open communication can help address student issues more effectively (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020). Creating a supportive environment where counselors feel valued and appreciated can also enhance their performance and job satisfaction (McConnell et al., 2020).

##### Technological Integration

Integrating technology into counseling services can enhance their effectiveness. Online platforms and communication tools can complement face-to-face counseling, providing additional support for students (Supriyanto et al., 2020). Training counselors in the use of technology for counseling purposes is also crucial for adapting to modern educational environments (Haddock, Cannon & Grey, 2020).

#### Conclusion

The study highlights the significant challenges faced by guidance advocates in public secondary schools in the Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. These challenges include a lack of formal training, heavy workloads, inadequate resources, and mental health issues among students. However, by adopting strategies such as professional training, resource allocation, collaborative approaches, and technological integration, schools can enhance the effectiveness of their guidance and counseling programs. The insights gained from this study provide valuable recommendations for improving the support and resources available to guidance advocates, ultimately benefiting the students they serve.

## 2. METHODS

In this chapter, key sections are presented, including research design, research participants, ethical considerations, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study.

#### Philosophical Assumptions of the Study

As a qualitative researcher, I recognized the importance of the ideas and theories underpinning my work and actively discussed them in my study. This research explored the experiences of guidance advocates in executing their guidance and counseling duties in public secondary schools in the Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. To guide my efforts, I examined theoretical approaches to qualitative research.

**Ontology:** Reality is subjective and multifaceted, as shown by the study's participants. According to Creswell (2015), the ontological question pertains to the qualitative researcher's understanding of reality. This study relied on the voices and interpretations of participants, providing evidence of different perspectives.

**Epistemology:** Creswell (2015) suggests that researchers should seek to reduce the gap between themselves and the subject of inquiry. My connection with the teachers was built over time, allowing me to comprehend their experiences deeply.

**Axiology:** Values play a crucial role in axiological assumptions. I considered the information from my participants valuable as it served as the basis for exploring their experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights in guidance and counseling.

**Rhetorics:** The study employed unique terminology and a personal narrative style, using qualitative terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### Qualitative Assumptions

This qualitative investigation employed a phenomenological methodology, aiming to describe experiences without hypotheses or assumptions. Phenomenology explores events through participants' subjective perspectives. This study focused on the experiences, challenges, and learning experiences of guidance advocates in public secondary schools in the Banaybanay District.

#### Research Design

This study was conducted qualitatively using a phenomenological method, following Creswell (2015). The study identified the phenomenon of secondary teachers' experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights in guidance and counseling. It was bounded by time (one-month data collection) and place (several schools/campuses), using extensive, multiple sources of information to provide a detailed picture of participants' responses.

#### Research Participants

The participants were ten secondary teachers in the Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), having fewer than twenty participants in a qualitative study enables strong connections with participants, facilitating open and candid information flow. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon. Criteria included holding a permanent teaching position, being assigned as a guidance advocate, and having experienced challenges in conducting guidance and counseling programs.

#### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report (1979), including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Participants' safety, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were prioritized. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Data privacy and protection were ensured, following the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173). Anonymization was maintained, and all collected data were securely stored.

#### Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I played various roles, including interviewer, recorder, transcriber, translator, and data analyst. Ensuring ethical rigor, I obtained approval from relevant authorities and safeguarded all data. Trust and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process. I documented interviews, transcribed data, translated responses, and analyzed the information to identify relevant themes.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, following IATF protocols. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Dean of Rizal Memorial College and the Schools Division Superintendent. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and were asked to sign an informed consent form. Virtual orientations were conducted to explain the study's purpose and the importance of participants' involvement. Open-ended questions and follow-up probes were used during interviews to gather detailed responses. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

#### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed, involving familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. Manual techniques such as note-taking, verbatim recording of selected spoken words, and thematic grids were used. Environmental triangulation was also applied to consider the impact of different locations and settings on the data.

#### Analytical Framework

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is flexible and can provide a rich, detailed account of data. The analysis involved six phases: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report.

#### Trustworthiness of the Study

To establish trustworthiness, the study adhered to principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was ensured through in-depth interviews, member checking, and triangulation. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual information and allowing replication of the study. Dependability was achieved through detailed explanations of methodology and thick descriptions of findings. Confirmability was ensured by focusing on participants' responses, providing an audit trail, and involving validators and analysts to verify the findings.

In conclusion, this chapter detailed the philosophical assumptions, qualitative approach, research design, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness measures employed in this study. These steps ensured the rigorous and ethical conduct of the research, providing valuable insights into the experiences of guidance advocates in public secondary schools in the Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental.

### 3. RESULTS

This chapter presents the investigation of the gaps in guidance and counseling through the lens of school guidance advocates. A qualitative framework was utilized, employing methods common to phenomenological research for data collection and analysis. The outcomes are a culmination of the school guidance advocates' experiences and insights into their lived experiences.

#### Experiences of Guidance Advocates in Guidance and Counseling

After analyzing the participants' responses about their experiences as guidance advocates, three themes emerged: experiencing difficulty in adjusting, adapting to responsibility, and struggling to complete tasks.

#### Experiencing Difficulty in Adjusting as Designated Guidance Advocate

Designated School Guidance Advocates are primarily teachers assigned to fulfill guidance counselor roles due to the absence of personal guidance counselors in schools. Participants shared that they initially struggled to adjust to these new responsibilities.

##### IDI-02:

"For me, my experience as a guidance advocate, especially at first, was really memorable since I had a hard time adjusting. But since there is a need to perform your duties and functions, you have no choice but to adjust."

##### IDI-04:

"At the start, I really had to adjust because it was a new experience, but I eventually recovered and prepared myself for future responsibilities."

##### IDI-10:

"What was really challenging for me was when I started as a guidance advocate since this was a new experience for me."

Adjustment fosters development and improvement of existing conditions. Participants emphasized their struggles initially but also highlighted their efforts to perform their duties effectively.

#### Adapting to Responsibility

Participants also experienced the need to adapt to their new responsibilities as guidance advocates. Despite their lack of preparation for this role, they worked hard to fulfill their duties.

##### IDI-06:

"Being a guidance advocate is not something we learned in college. So, when given this responsibility, you really have to work hard to learn what needs to be done."

##### IDI-05:

"I realized that you really have to allocate time to learn and adapt to your tasks as a guidance advocate."

IDI-09:

"When I started as a guidance advocate, I struggled with facilitating activities, but through hard work, I eventually adapted."

Despite the hardships, participants surpassed challenges by learning to adapt and perform their responsibilities effectively.

Struggling to Complete New Tasks

Participants faced dilemmas in completing tasks due to insufficient preparation for their roles as guidance advocates.

IDI-07:

"I struggled when I started as a guidance advocate because there are many responsibilities and tasks, and you are unfamiliar with these tasks."

IDI-06:

"The real struggle as a new guidance advocate is not knowing whom to ask for help with tasks and disseminating information to teachers."

IDI-03:

"The tasks given to me as a new guidance advocate were confusing since they were new, but you eventually learn how to do them through research and asking others for help."

Participants experienced challenges with unfamiliar tasks but managed to learn and adapt over time.

Coping Mechanisms of Guidance Advocates in Guidance and Counseling

Three themes emerged regarding coping mechanisms: focusing on helping the learners, adapting various strategies to improve guidance services, and collaborating with other guidance advocates.

Focusing on Helping the Learners

Participants coped by focusing on helping learners, which kept them motivated despite the challenges.

IDI-01:

"I handle the difficulties in guidance and counseling by motivating myself that I need to do this to help the students."

IDI-07:

"I try my best to adapt to my responsibilities to maximize helping my students."

IDI-03:

"It is important to focus on helping the students since it is our goal as teachers."

Focusing on helping students motivated guidance advocates to overcome challenges in their roles.

Adapting Various Strategies to Improve Guidance Services

Participants coped by adopting multiple strategies and assessing which worked best.

IDI-05:

"I benchmark on other guidance advocates' practices and try those strategies to see what is effective."

IDI-08:

"It is important to utilize more than one strategy as not all strategies work for every school."

Trying different strategies helped participants identify the most effective methods for improving guidance and counseling services.

Collaborating with Other Guidance Advocates

Participants coped by seeking assistance from fellow guidance advocates.

IDI-02:

"When I was new, I was not embarrassed to ask questions from fellow guidance advocates."

IDI-04:

"It is of great help to know when to ask for help, as your colleagues are willing to assist."

IDI-05:

"My fellow guidance advocates played a major role in helping me with my tasks."

Collaboration and seeking help from peers helped participants cope with the challenges they faced.

Insights of Guidance Advocates Drawn from the Findings of the Study



Three themes emerged regarding the insights gained: giving importance to training and seminars, implementing programs and activities for students, and providing needed facilities.

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

Participants emphasized the need for training and seminars to enhance their skills in providing guidance and counseling services.

IDI-02:

"It would be a great help if we were provided with appropriate training, especially since we handle problematic learners."

IDI-06:

"We feel happy when given training and seminars as it is an opportunity to meet fellow guidance advocates and share experiences."

IDI-05:

"Training and seminars are important as we have different experiences, and we learn from each other."

Training and seminars are seen as crucial for skill enhancement and experience sharing among guidance advocates.

#### Implementing Programs and Activities for Students

Facilitating programs and activities for students is a key responsibility of guidance advocates.

IDI-02:

"I ensure that we facilitate activities and programs that are helpful to the students." IDI-03:

"We should not be guidance advocates only on paper; we must provide good programs and activities for students."

Guidance and counseling services should include various programs and activities to help students cope with different challenges.

#### Providing Needed Facilities

Participants highlighted the significance of having the necessary facilities to perform their roles effectively.

IDI-07:

"I would appreciate having the necessary facilities, especially a private office for talking to students."

IDI-08:

"It is more motivating to perform duties when provided with the necessary facilities."

IDI-09:

"I am grateful to our principal for being supportive and providing the needed facilities."

Provision of adequate facilities motivates guidance advocates and enables them to offer holistic guidance and counseling services.

In conclusion, this chapter detailed the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of guidance advocates in public secondary schools in the Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. These findings provide valuable recommendations for enhancing guidance and counseling services in schools.

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the summary of the study and draws implications for future directions. The primary aim of this study was to explore the experiences of guidance advocates in executing their guidance and counseling duties in the public secondary schools of Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. It also investigated their coping strategies and insights derived from their experiences.

The research employed a qualitative phenomenological method informed by thematic analysis. Open-ended questions were used during interviews to gain a deeper understanding of respondents' actual experiences, influenced by Creswell (2006). Participants were encouraged to offer their opinions on the phenomenon through challenging questions.

#### Summary of Findings

After analyzing the responses, three themes emerged about the experiences of guidance advocates:

1. Experiencing difficulty in adjusting
2. Adapting to responsibility given
3. Struggling to complete tasks

For coping mechanisms, three themes emerged:

1. Focusing on helping the learners
2. Adapting various strategies to improve guidance services
3. Collaborating with other guidance advocates

Finally, regarding insights drawn from the study, three themes emerged:

1. Giving importance to trainings and seminars
2. Implementing programs and activities for students
3. Providing needed facilities

#### Implications

The analysis and discussion of the study results lead to several important implications:

1. Enhanced Preparedness for Academic, Professional, and Social Challenges:

Effective guidance and counseling by well-trained school counselors can assist students in better preparing for various life challenges by relating academic success to future success.

2. Addressing Psychological Issues:

Guidance and counseling services help students find solutions to psychological issues affecting their academic performance, fostering problem-solving skills.

3. Promoting Self-awareness and Behavioral Adaptation:

The primary goal is to help students gain self-awareness and adapt their behavior to deal with life's challenges, encouraging them to implement their conclusions for a fulfilling life.

4. Establishing and Improving Educational Programs:

Guidance and counseling services contribute to establishing, assessing, and enhancing educational programs, improving teaching and teacher competence, and reducing student expenses.

#### Promoting Healthy Lifestyles:

Guidance and counseling help students and teachers understand themselves and deal with life healthily, identifying problem-causing factors and seeking healthy ways to handle or avoid potential issues.

#### Future Directions of the Study

Recognizing the varied experiences of teachers in implementing guidance and counseling in schools, this section presents recommendations and future directions for further research:

1. In-depth Longitudinal Studies:

Future studies could explore the long-term involvement and experiences of school advocates in implementing guidance and counseling. Revisiting participants after a period could provide insights into changes in their experiences, struggles, and understandings.

2. Broader Scope of Participants:

While this study focused on school advocates in the Banaybanay District, future research could include perspectives from school administrators and other stakeholders. Including focus groups of teachers and principals could enhance the validity and accuracy of the results.

3. Mixed-Methods Research:

To obtain more valid and reliable results, future research should consider using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and effectiveness of guidance and counseling programs.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the experiences, coping mechanisms, and future directions for guidance advocates in public secondary schools. These findings can inform the development of more effective guidance and counseling programs, ultimately benefiting students, teachers, and the broader educational community.

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