



Bridging teaching role with designation as guidance counselor: its influence to job competence

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Abstract

This study investigated the competence, challenges, and coping strategies of teachers designated as guidance counselors in public elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao, Philippines. A sequential explanatory design was employed, involving both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A total of 89 teacher-designated guidance counselors participated through total enumeration. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were interpreted through thematic analysis. The results showed that the respondents were moderately competent across four domains: counseling skills, ethical and legal responsibilities, assessment and monitoring, and program management and coordination. Significant differences were established along competence and experience, training, age, and weekly caseloads. Major challenges included role ambiguity, inadequate training, lack of institutional support, and difficulties in time management and documentation. Coping strategies primarily involved self-initiative, peer collaboration, and informal learning. Overall, the study underscores the importance of equipping teacher-designated guidance counselors with the necessary competencies and resources to effectively support students' holistic development and well-being.

Keywords: Challenges, coping strategies, counseling skills, job competence, teacher-designate guidance counselors

Introduction

Guidance and counseling have been integral parts of the educational system, significantly influencing students' and teachers' personal and social development. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has mandated integrating guidance and counseling programs in schools, as outlined in DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 or the "Child Protection Policy," which emphasizes the need for interventions that safeguard student welfare. Republic Act No. 9258, also known as the "Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004," highlights the professional standards required for guidance counselors.

In schools, designated teachers who are guidance counselors play a vital role in addressing students' psychological and emotional needs, providing support, and fostering a conducive learning environment. The efficiency of these people and how they craft development plans largely depend on their competence and experience.

According to Lead Academy (2023), as per Britannica, guidance and counseling are ways of aiding individuals to discover and develop their educational, vocational, and psychological potentialities and thereby achieve the best level of personal happiness and social usefulness. In addition, Karan (2024) ^[20], stated that guidance and counseling are aimed at timely attention to low-complexity psychological problems.

Generally, guidance counselors are very important in schools. According to Pruitt (2023) ^[31], they can help provide information and perspective to students who might not be able to get it otherwise. Also, Marrero (2020) ^[26], highlighted that guidance counselors ensure students have excellent educational experiences. They provide essential social-emotional support in addition to academic support. Additionally, Root (2023) ^[32], shared that through counselors, children are advised on managing and dealing with emotional conflict and personal problems. Moreover, the importance of school guidance and counseling cannot be

overlooked as they shape children's personality. Students get comprehensive advice on careers, course selection, and prospects that enable them to make the right choice regarding their education and career. (Lead Academy, 2023) However, there are some cases where the designated guidance counselors are not adequately ready for their roles. A counselor may be new to the position and overwhelmed by the responsibilities, lacking the necessary training and experience to provide practical guidance. This can lead to significant challenges for students seeking help. Without a well-prepared counselor, students might receive generic advice that doesn't address their unique academic or emotional needs, causing them to feel unsupported and uncertain about their future.

Given all these matters on guidance and counseling, the researcher, as a designated guidance counselor in her school, aims to determine the level of competence and the experiences of designated guidance counselors/teachers in elementary and secondary schools of Lower Apayao. By identifying the strengths and gaps, the study seeks to contribute to improving support systems and developing a capacitation plan that aligns with the mandates of DepEd and the legal frameworks governing guidance and counseling in the Philippines. Given the increasing emphasis on mental health and student support in education, this study is timely and significant in enhancing the quality of counseling services in the Schools Division of Apayao.

Statement of the Problem

This study identified the competence, and unraveled the challenges, and coping strategies of teachers designated as guidance counselors in public elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao as the basis for the capacitation of a competency plan.

Specifically, the study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of the teachers designated as guidance counselors of elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao in terms of: age, sex, Plantilla position, number of years in guidance counseling, highest educational attainment, number of trainings along guidance and counseling, weekly average cases, number of programs/activities organized for students on guidance and counseling?
2. What is the level of competence of the teachers designated as guidance counselors of public elementary and secondary schools in Lower and Upper Apayao in terms of the following: a) Counselling Skills b) Ethical and Legal Responsibilities c) Assessment and Monitoring d) Program Management and Coordination
3. Is there a significant difference on the competence of teachers designated as guidance counselors when grouped according to the profile variables?
4. Is there an association between the competencies of the teachers designated as guidance counselors with their profile?
5. What are the challenges of the teachers designated as guidance counselors of public elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao as influenced by their profile characteristics and level of competence?
6. What are the coping strategies of the teachers designated as guidance counselors of public elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao based on their level of competence profile and challenges?

Methods and Procedures

Research Design

This study employed a mixed method of sequential explanatory design. This design involves two distinct phases. In the first phase, a descriptive-correlational quantitative design was used to gather numerical data to describe the demographic profile, the level of competence in four core areas of the teachers designated as guidance counselors. The data also identified significant differences and associations between and among the variables. The second phase employed a qualitative design through thematic analysis. This phase explored the lived experiences of the teacher-designated guidance counselors, focusing on the challenges they encountered and the coping strategies they employed. The integration of the two phases allowed the researcher to draw a more comprehensive understanding of the guidance counselor designation experience in Lower Apayao.

Locale of the Study

This research study was conducted in the elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao which comprises the districts of Flora, Sta. Marcela, Luna, and Pudtol during the School Year 2024-2025.

Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The respondents for this research were all the teachers designated as guidance counselors of the elementary and secondary schools in the districts of Lower Apayao. A total of 89 respondents participated in the study, 66 of whom are elementary and 23 are secondary teachers. Total enumeration was employed.

Research Instrument

The research questionnaire is composed of the following: Part I elicited the Profile of the respondents. Part II measured the Level of Competence of the teachers designated as guidance counselors along the four domains of Counseling Skills, Ethical and Legal Responsibilities, Assessment and Monitoring, and Program Management and Coordination adopted and modified questionnaire from Dimaculangan (2019) ^[12]. It was piloted to 50 elementary and secondary teachers designated as guidance counselors in the Sanchez Mira and Claveria District, Division of Cagayan with a Cronbach alpha reliability index of .97 indicating that the questionnaire is valid, reliable, and acceptable, with all sub-items demonstrating excellent reliability scores. Part III is the interview on their Challenges and Coping Strategies of these teacher-designated guidance counselors and their coping strategies.

Data Gathering Procedure

To collect the necessary data for this study, the researcher followed a structured process, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and adherence to ethical standards. The researcher secured formal approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Apayao to conduct the study in the identified schools. After obtaining the superintendent's approval, the researcher requested permission from the school heads or principals of the elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao. Upon receiving approval from the school heads, the researcher sought informed consent from the teacher-designated guidance counselors. The study's purpose was explained in detail, voluntary participation was emphasized, and confidentiality was assured to encourage honest responses. The researcher personally distributed the survey questionnaires and conducted the interview to the respondents in their respective schools.

Statistical Treatment

To effectively address the research questions of this study, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were employed, consistent with the sequential explanatory research design. In the quantitative phase, several statistical tools and techniques were applied. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentage distributions, were used to summarize and describe the demographic profiles of the teacher-designated guidance counselors. To assess the level of competence among the respondents, the weighted mean was utilized. The results were interpreted using a standardized scale. To determine whether there were statistically significant differences in competence based on profile variables, t-tests (for two-group comparisons) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (for comparisons involving more than two groups) were conducted. Furthermore, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between the respondents' profile variables and their competence levels. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was performed to identify and understand the challenges and coping strategies experienced by the participants. This involved systematically coding interview responses, identifying recurring themes and patterns, and synthesizing key insights to complement and deepen the understanding of the quantitative findings.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The results show that the average age of respondents is 42.08, with the largest group aged 36-40. This suggests that most teachers designated as guidance counselors are in their mid-career stage, bringing significant professional maturity to their roles. The teachers are predominantly female and most of them hold the position of Teacher III, indicating considerable advancement within their roles. Most respondents have 1-5 years of experience in guidance counseling, suggesting that many are relatively new to the role. In terms of educational attainment, majority of the respondents have completed or are pursuing a master's degree, while only 4.6% have attained a Ph.D., indicating that while advanced education is common, doctoral qualifications are rare. Regarding professional development, local training sessions are the most common, having attended 1-2 sessions. National and international trainings on guidance and counseling are scarce. The weekly caseload for most respondents is manageable, with 84.62% attending to 1-3 cases. However, a few handles more than nine cases weekly, pointing to possible disparities in workload distribution. In terms of programs and activities, the most frequently organized initiatives include Homeroom Guidance, Home Visitation, and Career Guidance. However, systematic tools like the HEADSSS Assessment Tool and referral follow-ups are underutilized, indicating gaps in structured assessment and monitoring practices.

Level of Competence of the Teachers Designated as Guidance Counselors

a. Counseling Skills

The result on the assessment of the level of competence of teachers designated as guidance counselors in terms of counseling skills shows that all the 10 indicators are rated as "Moderately Competent.". Among the indicators, the highest mean was observed in "encouraging students to take ownership of their personal and academic goals" (3.25), while the lowest mean was noted in "Using variety of counseling techniques tailored to each student's needs" (2.88). These findings suggest a consistent but moderate level of competence across all aspects of counseling skills. The results align with Dionaldo and Espinosa (2024) [4, 13], who emphasized that while teacher-designated counselors possess basic counseling skills, they often require further professional development to enhance their ability to tailor interventions effectively.

The moderately competent rating for "handling sensitive topics" and "guiding students through problem-solving" underscores the need for advanced training in these critical areas, as highlighted by Yulianti *et al.* (2022) [38]. These skills are essential for addressing complex student issues, particularly in settings where students face psychological or emotional challenges.

Furthermore, the study reflects the importance of fostering resilience and coping mechanisms among students, as suggested by the findings of Root (2023) [32], which emphasize that effective counselors help students develop strategies to navigate stressful situations. However, the moderate ratings for tailoring counseling techniques and tracking progress indicate gaps in the systematic application of advanced practices, which are crucial for addressing diverse student needs (Department of Education, 2023) [9].

The findings call for targeted capacity-building initiatives that focus on developing advanced counseling techniques, improving problem-solving guidance, and enhancing follow-up practices. These initiatives should also address the integration of individualized and culturally responsive interventions, as advocated by Wake Forest University (2024). By addressing these gaps, teachers designated as guidance counselors can improve their competence and better meet the complex needs of students in Lower Apayao.

b. Ethical and Legal Responsibilities

The composite means of 3.23 on the assessment on the level of competence of teachers designated as guidance counselors in terms of ethical and legal responsibilities indicates that respondents are "Moderately Competent" overall in this area. However, several aspects were rated as "Highly Competent," reflecting strengths in maintaining confidentiality, ensuring student welfare, obtaining consent, and referring cases beyond their expertise. These results highlight a solid foundation in critical ethical practices essential for effective guidance counseling.

On the other hand, areas such as familiarity with legal policies, understanding ethical standards, avoiding conflicts of interest, and proper documentation received lower ratings, falling within the "Moderately Competent" category. These findings suggest that while respondents demonstrate adequate proficiency in core ethical responsibilities, there is a need for enhanced training and capacity-building, particularly in legal compliance and systematic documentation. The results align with findings from Dionaldo and Espinosa (2024) [13], which emphasize the need for a deeper understanding of ethical and legal frameworks to strengthen the professional capabilities of guidance counselors. Furthermore, the moderate competence in legal policies and ethical documentation supports the observations of Madlambayan (2017) [24], who noted gaps in formal training among teacher-designated counselors, particularly in navigating the complexities of counseling regulations.

To address these gaps, targeted capacity-building programs are essential. These should focus on developing a comprehensive understanding of ethical standards and legal responsibilities, including practical approaches to resolving dilemmas and avoiding conflicts of interest.

c. Assessment and Monitoring

The assessment of the level of competence of teachers designated as guidance counselors in terms of assessment and monitoring indicates that the 2.89 mean shows that the respondents are "Moderately Competent" in this domain. This suggests that while they possess basic skills in using assessment tools and monitoring student progress, there are areas for improvement to enhance their effectiveness.

The results show that respondents perform relatively well in maintaining organized and confidential records of student assessments, which garnered the highest mean. However, other areas, such as utilizing validated assessment tools, customizing interventions based on assessment data, and regularly updating assessment skills, received lower ratings, highlighting gaps in advanced assessment practices. The lowest mean was observed in interpreting assessment results for effective communication with students and stakeholders (2.75), which points to a need for further training in data analysis and interpretation. These findings align with the

study of Madlambayan (2017) [24], which emphasized that teacher-designated counselors often lack access to advanced training in assessment methodologies, resulting in moderate competence levels in this critical area. Similarly, Root (2023) [32], emphasized the importance of using validated tools and data-driven strategies in delivering targeted interventions, an area where the respondents could improve. The moderate rating for customizing interventions based on assessment data also reflects gaps noted in Wake Forest University’s (2024) findings, which highlight the need for systematic professional development to enhance counseling outcomes.

To address these gaps, professional development programs should also prioritize training on refining assessment methods to improve their accuracy and reliability. By addressing these areas, teacher-designated guidance counselors can enhance their competence in assessment and monitoring, enabling them to provide more effective and data-driven support to students.

d. Program Management and Coordination

The result on the assessment of the level of competence of teachers designated as guidance counselors in terms of program management and coordination shows that the composite means of 3.00 suggests that the respondents are "Moderately Competent" in managing and coordinating guidance programs. While they demonstrate moderate competence in various aspects of program management, the results indicate room for improvement, particularly in areas requiring advanced planning and organizational skills.

Respondents performed relatively well in coordinating with teachers and engaging parents suggesting that they effectively collaborate with key stakeholders to support student development. Additionally, collaboration with community resources and setting measurable outcomes for counseling programs also show moderate strengths in expanding resources and aligning program goals with student needs.

However, lower ratings in indicators such as organizing workshops or seminars and managing time efficiently to balance counseling and administrative responsibilities, adjusting program activities based on feedback and regularly reviewing program goals highlight gaps in systematically evaluating and refining program implementation.

These findings align with the observations of Dionaldo and Espinosa (2024) [13], who highlighted the need for teacher-designated counselors to strengthen their capacity in program management and data-driven adjustments to activities. Additionally, Madlambayan (2017) [24], emphasized that time management and advanced planning are areas where guidance counselors often require support due to the dual responsibilities of counseling and teaching. Strengthening collaboration with stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community resources, should be prioritized to ensure a holistic approach to student support. By enhancing these competencies, teacher-designated guidance counselors can more effectively manage and coordinate programs that address the diverse needs of their students.

Table 1: Summary Assessments on the Level of Competence of the Teachers Designated as Guidance Counselors

Competence Domains	Composite Mean	Descriptive Value
Counseling Skills	3.08	Moderately Competent
Ethical and Legal Responsibilities	3.23	Moderately Competent
Assessment and Monitoring	2.89	Moderately Competent
Program Management and Coordination	3.00	Moderately Competent
Overall Mean	3.05	Moderately Competent

Comparison on the Competence Level of Teachers Designated as Guidance Counselors When Grouped According to the Profile Variables

Table 2 presents the comparison onto the competence level of teachers designated as guidance counselors and their profile variables. The findings indicate that most profile variables, such as age, sex, plantilla position/rank, highest educational attainment, and national trainings attended, do not significantly influence the competence level of the respondents across the four areas: counseling skills, ethical and legal responsibilities, assessment and monitoring, and program management and coordination.

However, significant differences were observed in specific areas when grouped according to the number of years in guidance counseling, local trainings attended, and weekly average cases of students attended. The number of years in guidance counseling showed a highly significant effect on program management and coordination (F-Value = 2.693, p = 0.003), highlighting the importance of experience in effectively managing and coordinating guidance programs. This finding aligns with Dionaldo and Espinosa (2024) [13], who emphasized that extensive experience enables counselors to develop more advanced strategies for planning and organizing programs, making them more adept at meeting student needs. Local training also showed a highly

significant effect on assessment and monitoring (F-Value = 3.242, p = 0.001). This supports the findings of Madlambayan (2017) [24], which emphasized that targeted local training enhances teachers' abilities to utilize validated assessment tools, interpret data effectively, and tailor interventions to students’ needs. This highlights the importance of continuous professional development in improving the technical skills of teacher-designated guidance counselors.

Also, the weekly average cases of students attended showed significant differences across all areas of competence, with highly significant effects on counseling skills (F-Value = 3.049, p = 0.001) and assessment and monitoring (F-Value = 3.760, p = 0.000). This finding suggests that handling a higher number of cases provides opportunities for counselors to refine their skills and gain practical experience, which is consistent with the experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984). However, it also underscores the potential for burnout if workloads are not managed effectively, as noted by Root (2023) [32], who highlighted the risks associated with excessive caseloads in guidance counseling. Significant differences were also observed in program management and coordination based on the weekly average cases of students attended (F-Value = 1.902, p = 0.036). This further reinforces the idea that experience with

diverse student issues enhances the ability to manage programs effectively. However, no significant differences were found in this area when grouped by the number of programs or activities organized, suggesting that program effectiveness may depend more on the quality of

implementation rather than the quantity. These findings emphasize the critical role of experience, targeted training, and exposure to real-life counseling situations in enhancing the competence of teacher-designated guidance counselors.

Table 2: Comparison on the Competence Level of Teachers Designated as Guidance Counselors When Grouped According to the Profile Variables

Profile Variables	Test Statistics	Counseling Skills	Ethical and Legal Responsibilities	Assessment and Monitoring	Program Management and Coordination
Number of Years in Guidance Counseling	F-Value	1.153	1.187	1.700	2.693**
	P-Value	0.337	0.309	0.068	0.003
Number of Local Trainings along GC	F-Value	1.576	0.426	3.242**	0.977
	P-Value	0.104	0.981	0.001	0.512
Weekly Average Cases of Students Attended	F-Value	3.049**	2.092*	3.760**	1.902*
	P-Value	0.001	0.020	0.000	0.036

** Highly Significant At 01 Level

*Significant At 05 Level

Association Between the Competence of the Teachers Designated as Guidance Counselors and their Profile

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix on the association between the competencies of teachers designated as guidance counselors and their profile variables. The analysis reveals significant relationships in several areas, highlighting the influence of specific profile factors on the competencies of the respondents. Age shows a significant positive correlation with ethical and legal responsibilities ($r = 0.305$, $p = 0.014$) and assessment and monitoring ($r = 0.251$, $p = 0.044$). This indicates that older counselors tend to exhibit stronger competence in adhering to ethical standards and utilizing assessment tools. This finding aligns with Dionaldo and Espinosa (2024) [13], who observed that age and maturity contribute to a better understanding of ethical practices and decision-making processes. In addition, plantilla position/rank shows significant positive correlations across all domains, particularly ethical and legal responsibilities ($r = 0.322$, $p = 0.009$) and assessment and monitoring ($r = 0.325$, $p = 0.008$). Higher-ranked teachers, such as Master Teachers, appear to demonstrate stronger competencies, which may be attributed to their experience, advanced training, and greater exposure to leadership roles. These results are consistent with Root (2023) [32], who highlighted that career progression often brings increased confidence and proficiency in counseling-related tasks. Also, number of years in guidance counseling has a significant positive correlation with ethical and legal responsibilities ($r = 0.265$, $p = 0.033$) and assessment and monitoring ($r = 0.292$, $p = 0.018$). This reinforces the idea

that experience plays a critical role in developing competence in handling ethical dilemmas and systematically assessing student needs. However, there is no significant correlation between years of experience and program management or counseling skills, indicating that these competencies may require targeted professional development.

Local training is significantly correlated with assessment and monitoring and program management and coordination. This finding underscores the value of localized professional development programs in equipping counselors with practical skills for evaluating student progress and managing guidance initiatives. Similarly, national training shows a significant positive correlation with program management and coordination, highlighting the importance of broader exposure to advanced techniques and strategies for program implementation. Lastly, the number of programs and activities organized shows a significant positive correlation with program management and coordination. Counselors who actively engage in organizing guidance-related activities tend to demonstrate higher competence in managing and coordinating programs, consistent with findings by Wake Forest University (2024) on the importance of practical application in building program management skills.

Overall, the results highlight the critical role of experience, training, and professional rank in enhancing the competencies of guidance counselors. By addressing these areas, teacher-designated guidance counselors can be better equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Table 3: Correlation matrix on the association between the competence of the teachers designated as guidance counselors and their profile

Profile Variables	Test Statistics	Counseling Skills	Ethical and Legal Responsibilities	Assessment and Monitoring	Program Management and Coordination
Age	Pearson Correlation	0.205	.305*	.251*	-0.168
	Probability Value	0.101	0.014	0.044	0.181
Plantilla Position/Rank	Pearson Correlation	.244*	.322**	.325**	.203*
	Probability Value	0.050	0.009	0.008	0.011
Number of Years in Guidance Counseling	Pearson Correlation	-0.157	.265*	.292*	-0.112
	Probability Value	0.210	0.033	0.018	0.375
No. Of local trainings along gc	Pearson Correlation	0.136	0.148	.259*	.337**
	Probability Value	0.279	0.240	0.037	0.006
No. Of national trainings along gc	Pearson Correlation	0.230	0.218	0.166	.314*
	Probability Value	0.066	0.081	0.188	0.011
No. of Programs/Activities Organized for Students on GC	Pearson Correlation	0.024	0.147	0.192	.269*
	Probability Value	0.851	0.243	0.125	0.030

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Challenges Experienced by The Teachers Designated as Guidance Counselors of Elementary and Secondary Schools

The major challenges encountered by teacher-designated guidance counselors, include time management and role conflict, lack of training, insufficient resources, high administrative expectations, difficulty in addressing complex student concerns, and lack of support from colleagues.

A recurring theme is the struggle with time management and role conflict, as many respondents indicated difficulty in balancing teaching responsibilities with guidance duties like in the statements of the following:

(R21) "I am always lacking time balancing my responsibilities as both a teacher and a guidance designate. I am an adviser of Grade 11 and have five subjects to teach daily."

(R35) "Time management is the most common concern when it comes to balancing responsibilities of a guidance counselor and a teacher."

(R6) "When there is a case that I need to attend to and I have an ongoing class, I don't know what to prioritize."

(R20) "Balancing roles as both a teacher and a guidance counselor involves managing distinct, yet overlapping responsibilities."

This aligns with the findings of Magsambol (2020) and DepEd (2024), who emphasize that role conflict and overload are significant barriers to effective counseling.

In addition to time constraints, many respondents expressed being inadequately prepared for the role of a guidance counselor, citing a lack of specialized training and experience. Several participants admitted to only attending one or two seminars or being new to the role and still learning. Some of the remarks are as follows:

1. "I need more training to do my tasks well as a designated guidance counselor."
2. "I have attended only one seminar on guidance and counseling, and I don't have enough knowledge on how to deal with different cases."
3. "Mental health concerns are the most challenging because I lack training in handling students experiencing anxiety, self-harm, or suicidal ideation."
4. "I cannot answer any of the questions because I have not undergone any training on guidance counseling and rarely, we do have no cases in school. Sometimes it's only slight 'bullying'."
5. "It is my first time as a guidance designate, and I am still learning the process."
6. "I still ask help from our outgoing guidance counselor because I am new in this position."

Pasco *et al.* (2023) ^[29], support the findings and emphasize that inadequate training undermines counselor effectiveness; also, Arfasa and Weldmeskel (2020) ^[31], stress the value of experience in successfully addressing student concerns.

Another challenge consistently mentioned was the lack of resources, including assessment tools and appropriate counseling spaces. Statements include the following:

1. "We lack tools such as psychological, career, and behavioral tests, which limit the scope of interventions."
2. "We do not have a standardized behavioral assessment tool for students."

3. "There is no budget allocated for materials or counseling programs."
4. "Yes, sometimes you are lack of materials needed in the process. Also, time it occupies a lot, if unavoidable circumstances occurs."
5. "I need to conduct counseling in the computer lab with makeshift partitions."
6. "A proper guidance office is needed to provide privacy and ensure confidential discussions."

There is no private space to meet with students confidentially especially when discussing sensitive topics."

These reflect the barriers posed by insufficient infrastructure. Joanna (2021) ^[9], Counseling Africa (2024) ^[4], and Root (2023) ^[32], collectively affirm that limited resources significantly hinder intervention scope and the maintenance of confidentiality in school-based counseling. Moreover, high expectations from administrators emerged as a stressor. Respondents reported being expected to juggle teaching and counseling roles seamlessly, despite insufficient support or reduction in teaching load. They also pointed out that excessive paperwork and reporting reduce the time available for meaningful student interaction. Their remarks include the following:

1. "Administrators expect too much from us, as if we know everything."
2. "They assume we can juggle teaching and counseling without reducing our teaching load."
3. "Administrative expectations and policies significantly shape our roles, often presenting both opportunities and challenges."
4. "Paperwork and reporting requirements consume too much time, reducing time available for student interaction."
5. "I sometimes struggle to meet expectations due to administrative demands."
6. "Since I am a full-time teacher, I admit I can hardly cope with the expectations regarding my task as a guidance counselor."

This is consistent with the observations of Madlambayan (2017) ^[24], and Lapan *et al.* (2021), who cite administrative overload as a key factor in counselor burnout

The complexity of student issues, particularly in the areas of family problems, mental health, and behavioral misconduct, was also a significant challenge. Participants expressed being unprepared to manage cases involving parental neglect, mental health crises, or repeated behavioral violations. Statements include the following:

1. "Family problems are challenging because they require cooperation from parents, which is not always possible."
2. "Parental neglect and family conflicts make it difficult to support students effectively."
3. "There are cases where parents refuse to acknowledge their child's behavioral or emotional struggles."
4. "Handling students who have anxiety, depression, or suicidal ideation requires training that I do not have."
5. "We need referral systems for mental health professionals since we are not equipped to handle severe cases."
6. "Students who habitually steal from stores present a challenge in terms of intervention."

7. "Bullying cases are difficult to handle because they involve multiple students and sometimes require legal intervention."
8. "It is hard to balance discipline and emotional support when dealing with defiant students."

Navarro and Santos (2018) highlight the necessity of parental cooperation in addressing family issues, while Yulianti *et al.* (2022) [38], advocate for proper training and referral systems to support counselors dealing with mental health cases.

1. Lastly, respondents frequently noted a lack of support from colleagues, parents, and community agencies. Many described poor cooperation from co-teachers, unclear role definitions, and minimal involvement from parents. Responses of the respondents are as follows: "Some colleagues are not fully cooperative, especially when guidance activities conflict with their teaching schedules."
2. "There are times when I need help, but my colleagues are too busy with their own tasks."
3. "Differences in priorities with my co-worker can make it challenging to provide timely support to students."
4. "Collaboration with teachers, administrators, and parents must be strengthened for effective student support."
5. "Many parents are unavailable or reluctant to participate in resolving student issues, which diminishes the impact of counseling interventions."
6. "We rarely receive support from community agencies, making it hard to refer students for external services."
7. "Some parents do not accept that their children need intervention, making it difficult to help struggling students."

These issues resonate with the insights of Davis (2021) [7], who stressed the importance of strong peer collaboration, and Arumugam *et al.* (2021) [4], who highlighted the need for active community and parental engagement to enhance counseling outcomes.

In summary, the challenges identified point to a systemic mismatch between the responsibilities assigned to teacher-designated guidance counselors and the institutional support provided. The data underscore the need for clear role definitions, capacity-building initiatives, resource allocation, and stronger collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that guidance services are both effective and sustainable in the school setting.

Coping Strategies of Teacher-Designated Guidance Counselors

The coping strategies of teacher-designated guidance counselors reveal a multifaceted approach to managing the demands of their dual roles. A prominent theme is religion and spirituality, where counselors draw emotional strength and clarity through faith-based coping such as prayer, meditation, and listening to religious music. These practices help them maintain purpose and resilience in their work, a finding supported by studies like De Guzman *et al.* (2023) [8], and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) [34], which emphasize the protective role of spiritual and emotion-focused coping. Physical activities and recreation also play a vital role in stress relief. Counselors engage in regular exercise, pursue hobbies, and ensure they take breaks, recognizing the

importance of physical well-being in managing mental health. These strategies echo the findings of Kim and Lambie (2020) [21], and Dominguez *et al.* (2024) [14], who noted that self-care practices such as physical activity contribute significantly to reducing burnout and improving overall well-being.

Another major theme involves stress management techniques like time management, maintaining a positive mindset, and seeking support from colleagues and mentors. These strategies help counselors stay organized and emotionally regulated amid heavy workloads. Literature by Alipato (2024) [2], and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) [34], confirms the effectiveness of these cognitive and social coping strategies in enhancing job performance and emotional stability.

Related to this is the use of task prioritization and organization, where counselors adopt scheduling tools, set goals, and delegate tasks to manage their responsibilities more efficiently. Such practices reduce work overload and ensure that both teaching and counseling duties are effectively balanced. These findings are aligned with the work of Griffith *et al.* (1999) [16], and Alipato (2024) [2, 4], who emphasize the role of structured planning and delegation in mitigating stress.

Professional growth and development emerged as another essential coping mechanism. Counselors reported attending seminars, webinars, and engaging in mentorship as ways to strengthen their competencies and confidence in guidance-related duties. This aligns with the research of Kim and Lambie (2020) [21], and Piersol (2023) [29], which highlights that continuous learning and collaboration with peers enhance coping capacity and professional identity.

Lastly, support systems and work-life balance are fundamental to counselor well-being. Support from colleagues, mentors, administrators, and family, along with clearly set boundaries between personal and professional responsibilities, helps counselors prevent emotional exhaustion. Studies by Letran Bataan (2020) [23], and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) [34], support these findings, emphasizing that robust support networks and clear role boundaries are critical in reducing stress and promoting job satisfaction.

The findings suggest that teacher-designated guidance counselors utilize diverse coping strategies to manage their workload and maintain their well-being. These strategies align with existing literature, which emphasizes faith-based coping, physical activities, time management, social support, professional development, and self-care as essential in preventing burnout and sustaining effectiveness. While these techniques help teachers navigate their dual roles, the study highlights the need for institutional interventions such as structured training, resource allocation, and workload adjustments to further support teacher-designates in fulfilling their responsibilities efficiently.

Conclusions

The teacher-designates as guidance counselors in public elementary and secondary schools in Lower Apayao are "Moderately Competent" in all key areas of guidance and counseling: counseling skills, ethical and legal responsibilities, assessment and monitoring, and program management and coordination.

A significant difference was established on the assessment and monitoring competence of teachers when grouped

according to local training attended. Also, there is a significant difference in the competence level of teachers across the four indicators when grouped according to weekly average cases of students attended. Moreover, significant differences were also found on the competence of teachers to that of number of years in guidance counseling, age and years of experience, the number of local training attended, and programs or activities organized.

Teachers designated as guidance counselors encountered various challenges like time management and role conflict, lack of training, lack of resources, high expectations from administrators, difficulty in addressing complex student issues and lack of support from colleagues. The coping mechanisms employed include religion and spirituality, stress management techniques, task prioritization and organization, attending to professional growth and development, asking for support from colleagues, mentors, and family, and establishing a work-life balance.

Recommendations

1. The Department of Education (DepEd) should take a proactive role in institutionalizing the capacitation of teacher-designated guidance counselors. Career progression opportunities should be enhanced by providing scholarships and incentives for further studies in counseling and psychology, ensuring long-term professional growth in the field.
2. School administrators should establish a counseling space to provide a private and well-equipped environment for confidential student consultations, and ensure institutional support by allocating dedicated time for counseling duties within the teacher-designates' schedules to prevent overwhelming workloads.
3. Teacher-designates should actively engage in continuous professional development by attending training programs, webinars, and mentorship opportunities to enhance their counseling skills.

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