

Challenges Impeding the Performance of Psychological Specialists and Educational Counselors in the University Context and Strategies to Overcome Them

Dr. Mokadem Safia

University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi Ouzou (Algeria)

*Correspondance Email : safia.mokadem@ummtto.dz

Received: 26/02/2023; Accepted: 13/08/2023; Published: 22/08/ 2023

Abstract

The current study aimed to identify the obstacles faced by the specialists in psychology and educational counselor in the university setting, as well as the ways to overcome them. It addressed key elements such as the definition of psychological counseling, its objectives, and the counseling process. Furthermore, it highlighted the major obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of counseling in the university environment and explored strategies to overcome them. The study concluded with a set of proposals to enhance the effectiveness of counseling in the university setting.

Keywords: specialists, psychologists, obstacles, university environment.

Tob Regul Sci. TM 2023 ;9(2):131 - 140

DOI: doi.org/10.18001/TRS.9.2.9

Introduction

The university is an educational institution where students spend most of their time, acquiring diverse experiences. It psychologically and educationally prepares them for study and work. This is where the role of the psychological specialist and educational counselor becomes apparent in assisting students in achieving these objectives and self-fulfillment. In order to successfully fulfill their counseling role in the university, it relies on the psychological specialist's abilities and competence in carrying out their counseling work, as well as their familiarity with the obstacles and difficulties they encounter and how to address them. Thus, the current study addressed the obstacles that hinder the performance of psychological specialists and educational counselors in the university setting, along with strategies to overcome them.

1- Definition of Psychological Counseling:

Psychological counseling, as defined by Abu Asaad (2009), refers to the services provided by specialized professionals in the field of counseling psychology, utilizing principles and methods of studying human behavior throughout its various developmental stages. These professionals offer

their services to strengthen the positive aspect of the counselor's personality and utilize it to facilitate the individual's adaptation. The primary goal is to develop new skills that assist in achieving developmental goals, adapting to life, and acquiring decision-making abilities. Counseling is provided to individuals of all age groups, including families, schools, and workplaces.

Abdulazim (2013) defined School Psychological Counseling as a professional relationship manifested through assistance provided from one individual to another. One individual, referred to as the counselee, is in need of support, while the other possesses the ability to provide that assistance, known as the specialist. This assistance is carried out through a specialized process based on principles, regulations, and techniques that allow the student the opportunity to understand oneself and recognize their abilities in a manner that promotes psychological well-being and harmony, driving them towards further growth and productivity. This professional relationship between the specialist and the student is established in a specific setting that ensures the confidentiality of the student's conversations.

Therefore, we find that psychological counseling is a conscious, continuous, constructive, and planned process aimed at assisting and encouraging individuals to know themselves, understand their physical, mental, social, and emotional aspects, comprehend their experiences, identify their problems and needs, become aware of available opportunities, and intelligently utilize and develop their potential to the best of their abilities. It involves making choices, decisions, and solving problems based on self-knowledge and personal desires, in addition to the education and specialized training received from counselors, educators, and parents in guidance and counseling centers, schools, and families. The ultimate goal is to establish and achieve clear objectives that ensure self-realization, psychological well-being, happiness with oneself and others in society, and personal, educational, professional, and familial success (Hatem Abdeen, 2019, pp. 13-14).

2- The goals of psychological counseling are as follows:

1. Achieving self-harmony for the individual:

Psychological counseling aims to help individuals achieve self-realization, enabling them to experience satisfaction and understand the motivations that guide their behavior. As a result of having a self-actualization drive, individuals are constantly prepared to develop knowledge about themselves by understanding their capabilities and potentials, and intelligently directing themselves within the boundaries of social standards.

2. Achieving adaptation and psychological well-being:

This entails establishing a balance between the individual and their environment by fulfilling their needs and the demands of their surroundings in various areas, including:

- Personal harmony: This involves satisfying the individual's innate organic needs in alignment with growth requirements
- Educational harmony: Counseling aims to assist individuals in selecting the most suitable and appropriate academic disciplines based on their abilities and inclinations.
- Achieving vocational harmony: This is accomplished by selecting a suitable profession and preparing for it both academically and practically, aiming to attain high levels of satisfaction and fulfillment in one's chosen career path.
- Achieving social harmony: This involves experiencing happiness and positive interactions with others while adhering to societal ethics, values, and norms. It entails accepting and positively engaging with social rules and regulations. (Al-Hadi Sarraya, Zeina Ben Trad, 2020, P. 276.).

Improving the Educational Process:

School is the primary institution where guidance and counseling are implemented, with education being one of its major domains. The educational process requires improvement centered around achieving a psychological atmosphere with its components, including:

- Respecting the student as an individual, both within the classroom community and within the school and society as a whole, while ensuring freedom, security, and comfort. This provides an opportunity for the holistic personal growth of students and facilitates the process of education.
- It is evident from the foregoing that psychological counseling aims to achieve a set of objectives, which include fostering individual harmony to enable a sense of satisfaction. It also strives to facilitate personal adaptation in personal, educational, professional, and social aspects in order to ensure the attainment of psychological well-being. Additionally, another objective is to enhance the educational process, enabling the comprehensive development of learners' personalities from all perspectives.

- Characteristics of Psychological Counseling:

Psychological counseling possesses a set of defining characteristics that delineate its nature and distinguish it as follows:

1. Interaction and Dynamism: Counseling is a process characterized by interactive and dynamic engagement between the counselor and the counselee. Each participant assumes their roles and responsibilities in accomplishing the objectives and effecting the desired changes.
2. Professionalism and Specialization: The counselor is a trained, specialized professional who carefully selects and undergoes training in the counseling process. They operate within an ethical code specific to the profession.

3. The Goal of Counseling: The aim of the counseling process is to discover the strengths within the counselee's personality and environment and utilize them in achieving the objectives of counseling and bringing about the desired change.

4. The Foundation of the Counseling Relationship: The success of the counseling process heavily relies on the counseling relationship, which is built upon acceptance, respect, and appreciation. It recognizes the counselee's right to express their thoughts, while considering their circumstances, abilities, and potential. (Hatem, Abdeen.,2019, P. 16).

The Need for Guidance and Counseling:

a. The accompanying changes in an individual's physical, psychological, social, and cognitive development often lead to the emergence of problems that individuals feel they need help to resolve.

b. Educational innovations and changes have increased the need for guidance in schools and universities. This is due to the growing student population, the diversity of academic disciplines, the challenges of adapting to curriculum updates, and the integration of technology into the educational field. These factors have resulted in the emergence of anxiety and confusion among students, making them in need of a psychological counselor who can guide them in overcoming anxiety and stress.

c. Rowing Social Changes: Such as changes in customs, traditions, and values, which lead to value conflicts and the emergence of contradictions. Lifestyle changes and the presence of contradictions further contribute to the need for guidance.

d. Changes in Family Dynamics: Changes in family structure, roles and functions, and the relationships between family members are aspects that necessitate counseling. Dependency on caregivers within or outside the home, instead of the mother, has deprived many children of fulfilling their psychological needs and has led to emotional and behavioral problems among them.

h. Rapid Technological Changes: Technological advancements and inventions, such as modern communication devices like television, the internet, and entertainment mediums, have had negative effects on relationships within families and society. This has led to the misinterpretation of ideas, concepts, trends, and values, resulting in the emergence of psychological problems that require the assistance of a counselor to overcome. (Naima Al-Mahdi, Abu Shaqour, P 56).

The individuals' need for guidance and counseling has emerged as a result of a multitude of factors, which are numerous and diverse. These factors can be categorized into the accompanying changes in individual growth, along with social, familial, and technological transformations, accompanied by the abundance and rapid flow of information. Additionally, educational changes

have also contributed to the presence of problems that must be overcome through the processes of guidance and counseling.

3- The Educational Psychologist:

As defined by the Ministry of Education, an educational psychologist is a member of the teaching staff or a qualified professional who studies the educational, health, social, and behavioral problems of students. They gather information related to these issues, whether it is connected to the student themselves or their surrounding environment. The purpose is to enlighten the student about their problem and assist them in contemplating appropriate solutions. The educational psychologist helps the student in selecting the suitable solution for themselves.

According to Nasou Saleh Al-Saeed , The counselor is a qualified and trained individual who works in various counseling fields: developmental, preventive, and therapeutic. They provide their counseling services through a formal and professional relationship to assist students in achieving their maximum growth potential. This is accomplished through organized and purposeful planning. (Nasou Saleh Al-Saeed, P, 267).

The Roles of an Educational Psychologist:

There are several roles that an educational psychologist plays in educational institutions. Some of these roles include:

1. Assisting students in overcoming psychological difficulties.
2. Providing developmental, preventive, and therapeutic programs, as well as crisis intervention programs and emergency situations. However, in a caregiving role, the focus is more on preventive and developmental aspects.
3. Helping students with emotional and affective problems to overcome them and find satisfactory solutions that lead to a sense of self-satisfaction and academic well-being.
4. Collaborating with school and university administrators, assisting them in gaining a better understanding of students.
5. Assisting students in coping with psychological and social pressures, through activities, programs, events, and structured projects.
- 6- Assisting new students in adapting to the academic environment.
- 7- Promoting positive behavior and social values among students and faculty members within the college.

8- Assisting students in decision-making.

9- Assisting students in choosing their future careers.

10- Conducting field visits to students' homes. (Nasou Saleh Al-Saeed, P, 180).

The Characteristics of a Psychologist:

The American Psychological Association highlights a set of characteristics that distinguish a psychologist, the most important of which are as follows:

1. Possesses a solid education in the field of psychology.
2. Has a genuine desire to help others, regardless of their backgrounds, while respecting their freedoms and privacy.
3. Demonstrates emotional balance to a degree that enables them to perform their work effectively and gain the trust of others.
4. Does not exploit others through the information they know about them.
5. Maintaining an objective and balanced relationship with individuals based on mutual trust and respect. (Ben Ghadfa Sherifa, P, 45).

The counseling process is an endeavor in which the counselor assists oneself by understanding and developing their own personality. This is done to achieve alignment with the surrounding world and enhance future psychological adaptability. The counseling process is based on the premise that guidance and psychological counseling are both a science and an art. It is built upon general foundations encompassing a set of assumptions and principles related to human behavior, the client, and the counseling process. Moreover, The counseling process is based on philosophical foundations related to the nature of human beings and the ethics of psychological counseling. It also relies on psychological foundations that address individual differences, gender differences, growth demands, as well as social foundations concerning the individual, the community, and societal influences. Additionally, it incorporates neurological and physiological foundations that pertain to the nervous system, sensory perception, and other bodily systems. It is worth noting that the foundations of

guidance and psychological counseling are complex rather than simple. The counseling process represents the practical application of psychological guidance, encompassing its foundations, theories, and available resources. (Safia Mohammed Al-Sulami, 2020, P, 127).

Obstacles Encountered during The Counseling Process:

Firstly, obstacles related to work conditions and environment:

Considering that the school counselor is an administrative employee bound by all administrative decisions and regulations to perform their diverse tasks, the following are some of the challenges that arise due to the magnitude of administrative work and increasing responsibilities:

1. Lack of available tests and assessments for diagnosing students' issues.
2. Excessive work sectors, workload density, and numerous responsibilities.
3. Lack of up-to-date information about university systems and academic curricula.
4. Absence of counseling references in the school library.
5. Lack of organized schedules for counseling sessions and career guidance sessions.
6. Limited media coverage for counseling programs.
7. Counselor being assigned non-counseling tasks.
8. Lack of dedicated counseling room.

(Hazem Sameeh Abu Fara, 2019, P 27, 28).

Secondly, obstacles specific to the professional development of counselors:

1. Limited focus of counselor training courses on theoretical study without practical application.
2. Lack of exchange of opinions and experiences among counselors.
3. Absence of a specific tool endorsed by supervisors to evaluate the counselor's work.
4. Supervisors not recognizing and disseminating successful counseling practices.
5. Insufficient number of training workshops for counselors.

(Hazem Sameeh Abu Fara, 2019, P, 27-28)

Thirdly, obstacles related to the counselor's personality:

School and professional counselors may face obstacles that hinder their counseling work, which can be attributed to their own characteristics and limitations. These obstacles can impact their effectiveness and can be summarized as follows:

1. Lack of certain competencies and necessary skills required for the job.
2. Insufficient training and qualifications.
3. Failure to adhere to professional ethics and boundaries.
4. Lack of motivation for work.

5. Inability to persuade or influence others.
6. Young age and limited experience compared to teachers and parents.
7. Rigidity, lack of self-confidence, and resistance to change.

Proposed solutions for obstacles in the counseling process:

Firstly, regarding work conditions and environment:

1. Facilitate meetings between educational counselors and school principals to exchange perspectives and reduce difficulties.
2. Encourage teachers to interact with educational counselors by submitting their annual reports.
3. Change teachers' attitudes towards counseling work.
4. Provide necessary equipment and resources to facilitate the work of educational counselors.
5. Provide necessary resources for counseling students with special needs.
6. Familiarize students with the responsibilities of the educational counselor in the school.
7. Change students' negative attitudes towards counseling work.
8. Explain the role of the educational counselor to parents through meetings or newsletters.

(Hazem Sameeh Abu Fara, 2019, P 29-30).

Secondly, in the field of professional development for counselors:

There are essential competencies that a counselor should possess, relating to their academic and professional preparation. These competencies include:

1. Ability to develop a counseling program.
2. Possession of a theoretical framework for interpreting human behavior.
3. Familiarity with various data collection methods.
4. Understanding the developmental stages that students go through.
5. Familiarity with all assessments used in the counseling process, their application, and interpretation of results.
6. Understanding the requirements and dimensions of the social and cultural context in which they work.

7. Proficiency in the necessary skills for the counseling process and the ability to utilize them effectively.

Hazem Sameeh Abu Fara. (2019). Pages 29-30.

Thirdly, in the area of the counselor's personality:

1. Provide thorough and comprehensive training for educational counselors, equipping them with the necessary skills to work in various counseling sectors.
2. Select educational counselors based on relevant criteria that match their suitability for the role.
3. Place the right counselor in the right position.
4. The counselor should explain the nature of their work to students, teachers, and parents.

(Hazem Sameeh Abu Fara, 2019, P, 30-31).

Additionally, there are technical, professional, material, and human difficulties that school counselors face when implementing counseling programs, including:

- Lack of cooperation from teachers with the school counselor.
- Insufficient financial incentives for outstanding counselors.
- Limited financial allocations for guidance and counseling programs.
- Shortage of specialized counselors in education and psychology.
- Limited or lack of communication channels with families, especially those in need. (Ismail Ben Khalifa, 2021, P, 114).

It is evident from the above that the psychological counselor, like any employee, faces a range of obstacles during the counseling process that may hinder the achievement of predetermined goals. These obstacles vary and include factors related to work conditions and environment, specific challenges in the professional development of the counselor, as well as impediments associated with the counselor's personality. To ensure that the psychological specialist and educational counselor perform their roles to the fullest extent, it is necessary to address these obstacles and find solutions that guarantee the smooth progress of the counseling process under optimal conditions. Among these solutions, we find the improvement of the counselor's work conditions, as well as the need for thorough professional and personal training for the counselor.

Conclusion

The essence of the matter lies in the crucial need to pay serious and effective attention to the process of psychological counseling in the university setting and to identify all the obstacles that

hinder its effectiveness. It is essential to overcome all the barriers that impede its success. Therefore, we propose a set of recommendations, the most important of which are:

1. Activating the role of the psychological counselor in universities, considering that psychological counseling has become an integral element of the educational process.
2. Organizing specialized training courses for educational counselors to exchange experiences and stay updated on the latest developments.
3. Ensuring that counselor training programs at the university level provide opportunities for practicing counseling skills using computer and educational technology to achieve the desired goals of psychological and educational counseling.

References

- [1] Hazem Sami Abu Fara. (2019). The obstacles faced by the psychological counselors in the schools of Hebron Governorate and the B to overcome them, MaMaster's Thesis in Psychological Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, Hebron University.
- [2] Al-Hadi Saraya. Zeina Ben Trad (2020).The reality of educational psychological counseling for students who excel in mathematics, Ouargla State High Schools, Researcher in Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 12, Issue
- [3] - Naima al-Mahdi Abu Shagur.(2014). The Practice of Educational Counselors for the Ethics of the Psychological and Educational Guidance and Counseling Profession , Journal of Laboratory Notebooks, Volume 9, Issue 1.
- [4] NAso Saleh Al-Saeed (DC). The Role of Psychological Specialization in Educational Institutions to Protect Youth from the Scourge of Drugs, Most Educational and Educational Research, No. 27.26.
- [5] Ben Fedan honorable woman.(2011) The reality of the psychologist within educational institutions - Journal of laboratory notebooks - volume6. Issue
- [6] Safia Mohammed Al-Salami. (2020). Obstacles facing the student counselor during the counseling practice - the stages of general education - the Arab League for Scientific Publishing - the issue.
- [7] Ismailbin Khalifa. (2021). Remote school psychological counseling, necessity and obstacles in light of the Corona pandemic CoFeed 19. Comprehensive Journal of Educational and Social Sciences, Vol. 4, No. 1.