

**Guidance Counselors' experiences on policy changes,
counseling students from immigrant backgrounds and
time management**

Ana Ciaran Cano

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Department of Education and Psychology
University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

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This qualitative research explores guidance counselors' experiences and challenges on 4 areas of their profession: Policy reforms, interaction with students and factors they consider important in their counseling roles. Lastly, in sections 3 and 4, their perspectives on counseling students from immigrant backgrounds. This study has two goals; To contribute to the research and development of counseling services for students from immigrant backgrounds and, to explore guidance counselors' views on the challenges they face in hopes of raising awareness.

13 guidance counselors from southern and central Finland were surveyed and/or interviewed. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis from a narrative perspective approach. Results indicate that the participating guidance counselors see that their jobs have become more demanding due to policy changes, administrative implementation, increasingly diverse student body, and the counselor-to-student ratio which has remained consistently high. Time management was identified as a problem affecting specifically the completion of essential and critical tasks. These tasks were also reported by guidance counselors as being the most enjoyable. Communication difficulties attributed to language differences and mismatched expectations between students, their families, and the guidance counselors were also a theme.

Previous research supports my findings. The stakeholders are addressing the issues above mentioned.

Keywords: Guidance counselors, Immigrant-background students, Policy changes, Time management, Upper secondary schools, Finland, intercultural counseling.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the year 2000, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) created the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The aim was to monitor educational achievement and systems by performing comparative international analyses of the different variables that might contribute to educational success. These are intended to be used for educational research and development. PISA is conducted every three years, and Finland has consistently outperformed the OECD average in student achievement from 2000 through the most recent assessment in 2018. (Ministry of Education And Culture, 2019) Guidance and counseling services in the schools are part of this successful educational model. The significance of studying, developing, and sharing successful educational models and their components for the benefit of all nations is compelling. Based on the 2018 Pisa results, first generation immigrants had a mean score of 107, below the national average in reading literacy skills. Second generation immigrants had a mean score of 71, below the national average in 2018. The gap between immigrants and Finnish-background students has remained stable in recent years. (Ministry of Education And Culture, 2019)

My research is empirical, based on what guidance counselors described to me about administration and policy changes. Also, about their interaction with students, mostly students from immigrant backgrounds. The writing style I use is based on critical reflexivity, meaning that I provide a lot of contextual details. (McLeod, 1999). I hope to make a significant contribution to the research and development of guidance and counseling services for immigrants. The other objective I would like to accomplish is to report on guidance counselors' perspectives on the issues they are currently facing. The goal is to increase awareness of the importance of resolving such challenges.

Global and national-level events continually impact and transform society, necessitating continuous action to respond to the new requirements that emerge

as society develops. The aim of my research is to identify and present the challenges that guidance counselors experience so that they may subsequently be further examined. Lastly, I consider this research significant because there is substantial popularity right now within the fields of education and immigration, with existing initiatives for the development of integration of immigrants and improved guidance and counseling services for this sector of the population (e.g., Startup Refugees, SIMHE). (Alho, 2021). With this study, I strive to contribute to sustaining this trajectory of public interest in the subject.

To achieve my objectives, I developed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do guidance counselors describe the effects of administrative changes in their jobs and what difficulties do they face as a result?

RQ2: What factors do guidance counselors consider important in their counseling roles?

RQ3: How do guidance counselors view a student's cultural background in counseling?

RQ4: How do guidance counselors see the role of students' backgrounds affecting the challenges they experience?

2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

I start this section by defining the terminology I will use. I continue by discussing the history of guidance and counseling in Finland, as well as its societal importance. Next, I address the critical role of a guidance counselor in school settings, the working conditions of guidance counselors, and the educational qualifications guidance counselors must have. I write about immigration last, and I finish this section with a summary of what I wrote. The intent of this section is to orientate the reader and situate the subject matter into context.

Definition of terms

I present in a list the most important terminology which is essential to fully understand the text.

- When I reference upper secondary schools, I include vocational schools as well.
- The term immigrant alludes to persons who reside in Finland and are of foreign descent and/or culture.
- I use the term “Immigrant background students”, “Student from an immigrant background” and occasionally “Immigrant student” to refer to any persons who have moved permanently to Finland for any reason and are now studying. I use these definitions of immigrant, acknowledging that there is a difference between moving to Finland by choice or moving without a choice. I also acknowledge that the immigrant experience is subjective and unique regardless of the reason, the place where the immigrant comes from or any other factor. Thus, I don’t aim to generalize any word or concept as it relates to the uniqueness of the individual’s experience to the words I use. (Lee, 1966).

- “Guidance counselor” is the main term I use in the thesis. I occasionally use the word "counselor" as an equivalent word for "guidance counselor". Furthermore, some guidance counselors referred to themselves as school counselors during the interviews. This can be observed when I quote them. All these terms are equivalent for the purpose of this thesis. Lastly I write in United States English language. This is important to clarify because the spelling of counselor is different in English from other places.

Background of Guidance and Counseling Services in Finland

I begin this section by providing the background of guidance and counseling services in Finland. To continue, I write about the different roles and functions that guidance counselors have. I use as a source the policies and legislations found in the data bank owned by the Ministry of Justice (Finlex), the Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH), the Trade Union of Educators (OAJ) and The Guidance Counselors' Association (SOPO). By doing so, I provide the framework necessary to understand the job roles of a guidance counselor. I continue by specifying about the importance of guidance and counseling services as it relates to immigrant students and follow these by briefly explaining the working conditions and the educational requirements for guidance counselors. By writing about all the above, my goal is to incorporate the multitudinous intricacies and depth of guidance and counseling as a profession into the setting of my research. Lastly, I provide the backdrop necessary to contextualize immigrants within the educational system. As (McLeod, 2001) noted, social and historical context is essential for the evaluation of the findings a study might yield.

The societal significance of Guidance and Counseling in Finland is well documented. Guidance and counseling services are a legal right for everyone regardless of age, housing location or life situation. Finland adheres to the model of Lifelong Guidance and Counseling. Services are offered through various actors and for a variety of purposes such as the employment office or One-Stop Guidance centers. (OPH, Finnish National Board of Education, 2021) There are significant resources that are allocated by the relevant actors in the coordination and development of Lifelong guidance projects. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020)

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment launched the Elo Lifelong Guiding Committee in 2020 with the objective of developing a strategy for a lifelong guidance plan. The Lifelong Guidance Initiative 2020–2023, jointly produced by the two ministries is tied to the current government initiative which aims to promote inclusion, well-being education and employment. Life-long guidance is a continuous self-development project in which guidance s provide support and advice. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

After explaining how guidance and counseling in Finland is considered an important subject with ongoing projects for development deemed worthy of investing resources on. I will now continue to illustrate the importance of quality guidance and counseling services from the perspective of the critical role it plays in a young adult's life.

Guidance counselors have a critical role in school settings. Part of a guidance counselor role is to provide support and orientation for the purpose of aiding the student to define and create a roadmap towards their future goals, such as educational and career plans. (OPH, Finnish National Board of Education, 2021). Students from immigrant backgrounds are at risk for more difficulties. Living in a culture different than the one a person is used to, poses an array of avenues for uncertainty which can lead to stress. (Makrooni, 2019) Additionally, people of immigrant background in Finland come in great part

from countries that have been at war, as refugees. Those experiences are still in the background while also trying to adapt to the new cultural norms and societal system of Finland. (Alitolppa-Niitamo A, Söderling I, Fågel S, 2005).

Guidance counselors are held to rigorous standards and have undergone substantial formal education and training to obtain their accreditation.

Guidance counselors must have a master's degree in guidance and counseling or a master's degree with an additional 60 ECTS of pedagogical studies plus 60 more ECTS of guidance and counseling studies. Another possibility is, that after completing a master's degree in which 60 ECTS are pedagogical studies so you can have credentials to be a teacher, 60 more ECTS are completed to specialize in Guidance and Counseling. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2021)

The guidance and counseling profession is regulated by the National Board of Education. There are best practices publications and consensus guidelines along with policies, governing the services provided by guidance counselors and the functions and responsibilities entrusted in them.

Those guidelines explained here briefly are:

- The role of the guidance counselor is to support the student with the aim of fostering the student's independence and the developing of skills within several areas of the student's personal development.
- Guidance and counseling services are delivered to the student not only by individual meetings with the guidance counselor but also by group and peer counseling.
- The main goals are, to support self-knowledge, to help with career planning, to aid in identifying personal strengths, and lastly problematic situations solving (OPH, Finnish National Board of Education, 2021)

I will now briefly discuss the practical aspects of a guidance counselors' work. I do this to provide a thorough picture of guidance counselors' profession, after which I finalize this section writing about immigrant students.

Practical aspects of guidance counselors' work

The information below will become relevant later, when I report what guidance counselors' observations are, concerning having chronic lack of time and big workloads.

Guidance counselors' working hours follow the "annual working hours" model. Hence, guidance counselors are supposed to work 1600 hours yearly, 400 hours from those the guidance counselor has the choice to use to devise and prepare their working plans and necessary materials as well as networking and communication with the pertinent stakeholders necessary for counseling the students in an individualized manner. There is a plan drafted at the beginning of the school year and it is monitored and evaluated at the end of the autumn and spring semester. (Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö, Trade Union of Education, 2020b)

In vocational schools, the amount of time a teacher and a guidance counselor need to work is a bit more flexible. These are recent changes as of August 2020 teachers and guidance counselors moved to the model of "annual working hours" model and it can be between 1500 and 1700 hours as agreed with the employer. If the work exceeds 1500 hours, then hourly pay is obtained by dividing the actual salary by 125. If the working time exceeds 1700 hours, it requires the teacher or guidance counselor consent and shall be reimbursed +1.5 times. These changes in the vocational schools' side of education, are the direct result of teachers and guidance counselors being overloaded with work as the job descriptions and roles have changed together with the reformation of the legislation as it relates to vocational schools. I will continue by writing about students from immigrant backgrounds' needs and intercultural guidance and counseling practices. (Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö, Trade Union of Education, 2020a)

Immigrant students may often have different or additional needs than Finnish students.

Immigrants have the task of learning about the culture of the host country. For example, they must navigate the new education system, learn Finnish, or find a job. They have to learn new cultural practices in a different environment and manage with the various attitudes they get from mainstream society. They must adjust and adapt. Experiences of culture shock are common among immigrants as well as feelings of isolation, anxiety, and powerlessness. (Sue & Sue, 2015) Based on the above, it is logical to assume that their needs when it comes to guidance counseling can be different too. For example, they may need more information about language courses, how the educational system works, or how to go about seeking services specialized in immigration related matters.

Multicultural competences among guidance counselors are critical for a young person's steady and positive transition through the post-migration phases. In order to provide successful guidance and counseling services, there is a consensus among the relevant academic community that intercultural competences are an essential component of the guidance counselors' skills. (Sue & Sue, 2015)

The findings from a PISA study carried out in 2012 indicated that how efficiently the student was able to use the language of instruction, and whether the student missed class or was late a lot, had an impact in their grades. (Harju-Luukkainen, Nissinen, Sulkunen, Suni, & Vettenranta, 2014).

Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000) explored the process of acculturation as it relates to the wellbeing of adolescent immigrants. Immigrants have to reconcile their identity with that of the new residence country. There are factors influencing this, for example what the immigrant feels it is expected of him/her from society. In other words, whether they feel valued, acknowledged and/or understood influences how the acculturation experience unfolds. Based on that premise is reasonable to consider, that miscommunication will cause added burdens. In the same study Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000) refer to

(Ying, 1996) who wrote about satisfaction levels among immigrants and factors which affected those levels of satisfaction. Not surprisingly, the inability to communicate in the language of the new country is a source of stress for the immigrant since it adds yet another hindrance to effectively do everyday things.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This part intends to provide the reader with information about the participants and methods used to collect data. This is necessary to make an informed decision about the fitness of the study's design as well as draw comparisons between the findings and those of similar studies. I include in this section the ethical solutions as well because they should be approach withing the detailed context of the instances into which they were addressed.

3.1 Sampling plan, Research participants & methods of data collection

My sampling plan for the data collection could be defined as Opportunistic, Snowball and Typical instance. Opportunistic because I had the opportunity to use of my personal and professional network to facilitate access to participants which otherwise would have been expensive and time consuming to access. Snowball because through some research participants I was introduced to other participants which also participated in the study and Typical instance because I was looking for participants with specific characteristics. The requirements were that participants needed to have some experience in counseling students from immigrant backgrounds and were currently working or had worked in in upper secondary and/or vocational schools.(Tracy, 2013)

From interviews to survey and back to interviews. From semi-structured to naturalistic approach conducting the interviews. Switching between methods of data collection and switching how to approach the method of data collection.

My initial intent was to collect data through interviews. However, I performed two sample interviews and I decided that a survey would be a more appropriate

method of data collection based on the overall impression I got when I did the sample interviews.

I composed a Webropol **online survey** consisting of 9 questions which can be found in Annex 1. It was an anonymous survey and to ensure that participants' identities were protected the link was distributed via email by a third party to the guidance counselors. No metadata was collected by webropol either.

This link was sent out to 27 guidance counselors from which 4 of them answered all the questions and completed the survey fully. I needed more participants.

In a second attempt to collect more data, another 3rd party gave me the contact information of guidance counselors who had previously agreed to volunteer their time. I switched **again to interviews** because the participants were scarce to come by and the interviews gave me the opportunity to ask the participants to elaborate in their answers.

I rephrased the questions, utilizing the knowledge acquired from one respondent towards deepening that knowledge with the next interviewee by adding other questions or rephrasing once more the ones I had. Additionally, each of the counselors I interviewed were interested in specific aspects of their profession, so I extemporized my questions for each interviewee to get information about that area of expertise and interests to them throughout the interviews. This means that no two interviews are identical.

To sum up, although I intended to adhere to a semi-structured 'interview schedule' style of data collection, I ended up using a naturalistic approach, in free format. Meaning that, these interviews were performed in a manner that is similar to real conversation between two individuals but also that, even if the wording of certain questions varies, the list of themes stays mostly consistent. (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006) The interviews were **mediated synchronous interviews**, meaning that we used a media platform to communicate (Zoom) and both me and the interviewee were online at the same time. (Tracy, 2013)

3.2 Data Analysis process

In this section I explain my decision to use Thematic Analysis (TA) and describe my approach to TA and how I carried out TA in practice.

Thematic Analysis (TA)

TA was the most suitable method to look for general themes for the research questions I had and the most appropriate for the way to reach my goal which was to discover, examine, classify, define, and document the themes that emerged from my interviews. (Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. 2017).

Another factor which had an influence in my decision to study about counselors' experiences using TA, is that I found the rules to be logical and arranged in such a way that a second person could easily evaluate the analysis' quality. The codes I produced are based on the data's themes, and there is limited opportunity for subjectivity. Apart from finding this systematic method effective, there was the added benefit of allowing me to name, code, and approach the research from whichever theoretical framework occurred to be the most appropriate after I began the analysis. The only disadvantage I encountered with this methodology is that the experts who provide the guidelines for this approach discourage linguistic interpretation. It is thought to influence the results' objectivity. (Nowell et al., 2017)

My approach to Thematic Analysis throughout the analytic procedure.

The framework for my analysis fits the iterative model. By this, I mean that I reviewed the data over and over to establish patterns and create codes. Quotations were switched back and forth between codes as I learned more and drew new connections. I aimed to ground the meaning solely on the emerging data as I coded. However, what I learned from one counselor built on what I learned from the next and I had to do some literature review to make sure I understood well what patterns I was coding. Hence my approach was a mix of an emic and etic methods. When I created the codes, I interpreted the data independently of the sources. I was unfamiliar with previous research or information, but I did have some knowledge that influenced my asking technique. As a result, **etic** as well as emic techniques are used. (Tracy, 2013)

Steps in the analytical process.

Using qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti version 9. I created codes and used those codes to organize the data from the interview as a starting point for my analytical process. Atlas was simply used to speed up the process of developing codes, not to evaluate data. At the same time, I did the same in a word processor document. This proved useful when I compared both sets of codes and they were highly similar. I used one method to complement the other and everything was unified in a word processor document.

To avoid confusion, I colored coded and formatted the typeface of each participant in the word processor. This added precaution, ensured anonymity, and ensured that all the participants were clearly identifiable. In addition, each participant was given a unique number.

I used open coding. Open coding was a term coined by Glaser which as cited by (Belgrave & Seide, 2019) is described the following way:

Is the process in which one codes each line or sentence of his or her data in 'every way possible' the three most fundamental questions are: 'What is this data a study of? ... What category does this incident indicate? ... [and] What is actually happening in the data?' (Glaser 1978, p. 57)

I broke off the data into the smallest pieces possible without paying attention to frequencies or themes in the first cycle of coding. While it's been pointed out the drawbacks of this technique, including the fact that it is time consuming, it was necessary to begin this in this manner in order to develop a consistent and organized methodology. When the list of codes was saturated, I then re-combined the categories in less broad codes. I went over every sentence and paragraph of all the interviews and surveys and created a code for every given piece of data regardless of its recurrence or if it was it was relevant for this study. I did not want to make any assumptions and it could have proven useful later. Everything got coded in the first cycle. In other words, even if the theme was found only once and not repeated, there was a code created for it and not necessarily re-combined into a broader one in the second cycle of the data analysis. (Charmaz, 2015)

3.3 Reliability and ethical aspects

Reliability

A deviation from the conventional frameworks was, that I used email to send questions in advance to some participants. Two of them I received back with answers filled in, which gave me the opportunity to expand into those answers and compose new questions before the interview with them. In the occasions in which I didn't get the answers, the person had time to reflect upon the material. This means, that there was inconsistency throughout the data collection process, and it might have affected the data.

An error during the data collection process was that I occasionally used close ended questions. Even while it is a valid interview method, the way the questions were posed, occasionally seemed persuasive, which might have led to an answer which was affected by the interaction.

There were occasions in which I engaged in conversation with the interviewee for the purpose of clarifying the questions by giving examples. In

some of these cases I used excessive prompting and unintentionally I explained the interviewee my point of view.

In sum, the data acquired in some instances might have been affected by reaction at the procedural and personal factors of the questioning implementation. (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006)

It is critical to note that the professional counselors interviewed were firm in their convictions and answers regardless of the above mentioned. As a result, the implications of the flaws during the interviews were not severe.

Other factors to consider which may have had an impact during the data collection stage, was that the level of English of some interviewees was insufficient at times as so was my background knowledge of the topics/themes the counselors were discussing with me. By paraphrasing and using close ended questions this challenge was bridged to some extent. I considered all the above throughout the data analysis.

Ethical aspects

Throughout the previous sections, I discussed ethical implications on various occasions. In this section, I address some of them in further depth and reflectively evaluate new ones.

After completing data management training through a course called “Personal data processing during academic research” I was familiarized with the agreement templates, data protection and rights of the participants. I intended to adhere to the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR), guidelines provided by The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). The most important ethical principles are, respecting the dignity and agency of the participants and conducting research without jeopardizing the participants’ wellbeing in any way. (TENK, 2019) To meet those two principles in this study, I had to ensure the anonymity of the participants by deleting/modifying identifiers from the data and storing the data safely.

As part of the data collection, originally I was going to collect the age and the number of years that the guidance counselors had been working in their professions. I did ask in some interviews, and it was a mandatory question in the surveys, but I did not use that data to relate the results to previous studies because the study changed as the data analysis process advanced.

To start with, I invited the guidance counselors to participate in my study with a research notification request explaining the aims and potential benefits of the study they would be contributing to. (Annex 2). I included a privacy notice explaining that they could withdraw from the study at any time, also it explained how the data would be deleted after the study ends and that I would send the work to them after it was completed. (Annex 3). Included here as well I sent the instructions to complete the webropol survey (Annex 4). The instructions were included to provide all the details necessary to the participants ahead of time so that they can make an informed decision about their participation such as how much time and effort they would need to invest during the surveys and or the interviews.

What follows is a checklist of disclosures that apply to my study. I gave these to the participants in the early stages of the data collection. They are required by the University of Jyväskylä and The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity.

- Identity and contact details of the data controller
- Contact details of the data
- Protection officer (if named)
- Purpose for processing personal data sufficiently specific
- Information about the right to withdraw consent at any time without this affecting the lawfulness of the processing of personal data conducted before the withdrawal
- Legitimate interests if processing is based on the legitimate interests of the data controller or a third party
- Storage period of personal data
- Personal data categories
- -Information about where the personal data was obtained from
- Information about the rights of the data subject
- Information about the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority
- Recipients or categories of recipients of personal data
- Information on whether providing personal data is a contractual or statutory requirement and the consequences of failing to provide the data (TENK 2019, p.25)

I used the University's Virtual Private Network (Cisco AnyConnect, version 4.10.02086) while conducting the interviews. This ensured that the connection was secure and private.

Before the anonymization, the data was stored in a Nextcloud folder. Nextcloud (version 20.0.14 enterprise) is an information security and data protection system to store data classified as confidential in the University's storage system. (University of Jyväskylä, n.d.) I transcribed the interviews and deleted all identifiers, after that I worked only with the anonymized version of the transcripts and the original transcripts and videos before anonymization remained in Nextcloud. This folder was available only to me and my thesis supervisor.

The participants are customarily identified by their initials, a number, or a pseudonym. I decided against it since I noticed there was a risk that the participants were identified by combining the data and quotes.

Lastly, regarding the ethical aspects related to the participants is necessary to mention that I corresponded with two of the counselors via unencrypted e-mail. It was an error which did not comply the data management guidelines.

Plagiarism.

Plagiarism is defined as conveying someone else's insights, material, or research results as if they were your own. The usage of references competently is a crucial sign of strong academic writing. When using the pertinent reference guidelines precisely, the source of each piece of information, observation, or opinion must be indicated in an unambiguous and specific form. I used the APA 7th Edition guidelines and revised them several times so that the sources I used to write this thesis have been acknowledged to the best of my abilities. (Lerkkanen, 2021)

4 RESULTS

The outcomes of this study are covered in this part. Each subheading addresses one of the four research questions. (See table 4). Owing to the tight scope of the subject, the themes' elements are integrally connected and often occur simultaneously and/or cross-over. This is the reason some findings are reported in one section but may be applicable in others as well. As such, the results should be viewed holistically. All the subsections under the results heading follow this structure:

- i. First, I write a *synopsis* about the contents and *clarifications* as needed about the presentation of the findings.
- ii. Next, there is *a table containing the thematized counselor's responses*.
- iii. Afterwards, *I present the findings*. Excerpts from my interviewees with the counselors are used to do so. On occasion, I add my insights for contextualization purposes.

Table 4. *Research Questions & Their correspondent Results Sub-heading*

Research question	Section number and name
RQ1: How do counselors describe the effects of administrative changes in their job and what challenges are they experiencing as a result?	4.1 Policy reforms & changes. Counselors describe their experiences and challenges
RQ2: What factors do counselors consider important in their counselling roles?	4.2 Interaction with students. Factors counselors consider important and the most enjoyable task of their professional roles
RQ3: How do counsellors see the role of student's cultural background in counselling?	4.3 Working with diverse groups of students: Counselors' perspectives on whether there are differences between counseling students of immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds
RQ4: How do counsellors see the role of students' background affecting the challenges they experience.	4.4 Challenges working with students from immigrant and non-immigrant background

4.1 Policy reforms & changes. Counselors describe their experiences and challenges

This section relates to (RQ1): How do counselors describe the effects of administrative changes in their job and what challenges are they experiencing as a result?

Excessive numbers of students per each counselor, insufficient time for these students, and time management difficulties, are the primary issues identified in the questionnaires and interviews. Time management and workload play a role in the other challenges reported by the counselors as well. The results in the table are presented in order of frequency.

Table 4.1. *Guidance Counselors' (n=13) responses indicating what challenges are they experiencing.*

Response	f
I. Student-to-counselor ratio too high	11
II. Time management challenges	10
III. Time for meeting with the student is insufficient	9
IV. Multiagency cooperation and change in the students' privacy policies	7
V. Diversification of roles and the need to keep up with the flux of information	5
VI. Flexibility with student enrollment periods	3
VII. Schools growing.	3

I. The student-to-counselor ratio

A guidance counselor with 40 years of experience, twenty working as a teacher and twenty working as a counselor, said during the interview:

My working hours were 24 hours every day. If you mean, could I do it in school? When I came home, I kept working on things, and most of the time, I also answered emails and

all sorts of stuff. I did not have such a thing as working hours and home hours (Counselor).

To contextualize this comment, this counselor was quite content to work as many hours as necessary. I will quote him/her once more:

Part of being a counselor is living that life. And if you hear something in the news, of course you listen to that. Because you are interested in things that are related to your job. It is part of your life being a counselor, is not only a job only, it is what you are. That I feel very strongly. (Counselor)

Although this counselor was specific about the hours she worked and how the workload was never an issue for him/her, but a necessary component of his/her commitment to students and her values. The following excerpt from the interview exemplifies that he/she believes, schools are understaffed, and counselors are overworked.

Everywhere they should hire more people. There are so many students for each counselor, almost everywhere. That was not so important in the school I worked, because the situation then was quite good, and the other teachers were helping the students with things than in the other schools the counselors do. (...) In some schools I know that there are too many students per each counselor. (Counselor)

Some counsellors indicated that the ratio of students per counselor is not a new challenge – three examples here:

When I started (10–15 years ago), I had nearly five hundred students. At the beginning of the last August, I had a bit over 350 and that is quite a lot. Then, by that Christmas it was four hundred already. (Counselor)

The number of students I manage has been up and down (...) now a little bit higher, so there is not a bit a very big difference in that. (...) I have lots of students and they are needing help and so it is making the timetable very tight. (Counselor)

I think the crucial issue is the amount of students. I think so. At the moment...I have... well, at every school I have worked. The amount of students have been too high. So, there is not room for flexibility or... I think the crucial issue is the number of students. (Counselor)

II. Time management challenges.

The following are factors listed by counselors regarding time management. They have confronted unexpected events during the day that result in planned tasks

not being completed. In addition, they often have fast-paced work, a constant sense of rush, and must conduct job-related tasks outside of usual office hours.

Also, I think that the time has changed a lot. Sometimes I feel that the days are pretty chaotic as so many incidents happen during the work day suddenly and it is necessary to react to, well, anything that happens around you and during the student's school days and nowadays I think one of the most important skills necessary at work is time management and also this skill to prioritize your duties during the work day. What needs to be done now, immediately and what can be done tomorrow and so on. Yeah, that has changed a lot during the last 10 years. Actually, I don't know why it has changed but, it might also depend on the school and the size of the school and how many students are there. I have worked in different schools during the last few years. The school where I work now it's pretty big and many things happen during the day. So, it is very important to react, to react to the incident and what happens during the day. (Counselor)

The challenge is quite often, that when you look at your calendar, right? (You tell yourself) -OK, this is kind of (the day I have planned) and I am telling you. It is never going to be like that. (Counselor)

Very often when I come to work I have at least 2 or 3 tasks that need to be done and when I am leaving from work at for example...I realize that I have had no time to do those two or three tasks. (Counselor)

Yeah, maybe that's part of the dream. That the day would look like what the calendar says so you don't have to do kind of an emergency call anywhere. So that's part of the dream. It's what a dream day would look like. Stick to the plan yes. Or maybe not that many surprises during the day. Because the surprises of the day they normally mess up with the schedule and they make you be in a hurry and then you have to let something else be undone, and then you get a continuous problem with the time. (Counselor)

Fast-paced work and a continual sense of urgency are attributes conveyed by 10/13 counselors. Here is another quotation to exemplify that statement. I asked this counselor if he/she has time to research and gather materials or look for information based on the emergent needs of the student or the situation. This was the answer:

No, working hours are very busy, and I feel like having more needs to answer than time to work. So, if you understand. So, it is like very fast paced work. And that is also...when you asked the things I don't like in my job. Fast-paced working is something that is not very pleasant. So, way too little time for reflection and research. (Counselor)

Finally, working outside of normal business hours was also reported by the counselors.

Sometimes I am working until 11 in the evening when my husband is sleeping. He does not like about my schedule when is so late. And sometimes I am thinking about my students' situation at home but when I am on vacation, I do not think about anything about the work. I have to take time for myself. (Counselor)

Sometimes...I had to work.... I had like every of my work, working hours full. That I could stay on holiday. But it takes much more, much, much more hours this work. Then, then you really had to work. So almost making voluntary work after that. (Counselor)

Also, we have work in summer. Yes, I don't know if you've heard about. I have occasion holyday also, but I mean. (Counselor)

Adhering to the foundational theme of time management difficulties, next I will report about the theme of counselors wanting to have more time to meet with the students.

III. Time for meeting with the students is insufficient

The aspect of their professional roles that counselors like the most is their direct interaction with the students. This is conversely what 11/13 counselors are reporting not having time for.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with a guidance counselor. I include it here to exemplify the results of a counselor giving the student the required time for his unique situation and needs. It is important to notice how during the counselor's response, he/she mentions that this is not something that can be done with all students because of the time it requires.

AC: Could you please tell me about a challenging case, which happened with a foreign background student which ended up with a positive outcome? What did you do to reach this outcome?

Counselor: One case comes to my mind. I don't know how the person is doing nowadays but I think that the most important thing in this kind of situation is that I was very persistent and...I used a lot of time and I tried to gain the trust of the student. The last time we met it was a very positive meeting and I thought that... Now it is the time to let the person take his/her next step. (...) And... but... I used an enormous amount of time for the student, and I don't know if it was wise to use that huge amount of time. (however) I don't know if this would have happened any other way (the positive outcome), but I thought that I needed to do this. I had to work this kind of way. But then when it comes to this time management. If I use 20 hours for one student, then, probably I cannot use the same time for another student, but I think that the outcome for this student was pretty good.

I will contextualize the preceding excerpt from the meeting with an additional quotation. My intent is to draw attention to what seems to be, counselors performing a triage to determine which students require the most urgent assistance to help them first. This in turn does leave behind those students who might be shy or less inclined to ask for help.

Counselor: Well, I think it comes also with the experience that you... somehow like sense... and yeah, try to think of which students may need more help during their studies. And you need to do it in the beginning and try to gain the trust and also the...Well, to gain the trust, but well it sometimes...it is...It only means that you get to know each other and to...

AC: Create a relationship?

Counselor: Yeah. Exactly. Yeah.

AC: Just to clarify. I have heard the word "time" several times in this question which leads me to think that once again time is a factor for this particular situation, am I correct?

Counselor: Yes, yeah, the time is so that...that... Right. It it's crucial.

AC: Lack of time.

Counselor: Umm yeah, 'cause usually you need to concentrate on those students who are finishing their studies and how to plan their future. So, some, usually I feel that I don't have time for those who are in the beginning of their studies.

This is what is important to notice here. The counselor first explains the importance of establishing a relationship with the student at the beginning of their studies. But then says that he/she needs to concentrate in the students that are finishing the studies and has not time for the new students. This situation is not exclusive of this school or counselor. Something similar happens to this counselor:

I have time for those students who have pretty challenging situations, but I do not have time for those students who have kind of normal situations in their lives. So, I would like to have more time and concentrate more in those students also. I think this is what happens when you don't have enough time. I think most of the work I do at the school right now concentrates around those students that have pretty big problems. Or I think I use most of the energy. (With these students)- (Counselor)

Here is one more example of this critical issue. The following, is from one of the questionnaires:

Question: What do you find the most demanding or challenging about your job in general?

Answer: I don't have enough time for students. I need more time for those processes which are needed for a decent result. It's only a scratch on a surface for an individual now. It is rare that students ask that much guidance they really need. When they contact me, they even they feel sorry. I always say I'm working for them and they should contact me more often. Don't be sorry, just ask help.

Question: Write a case description about a challenging situation concerning a counselling interaction with a foreign background student which ended with a positive outcome. Please include what did you do specifically to reach the positive outcome.

Answer: It's always about understanding. I remember many cases which are like same. Counselling ending with a positive outcome when I have had enough time and I have listened that long as we have reached mutual understanding. And understanding is related with listening.

Question: Write a case description about a challenging situation concerning a counselling interaction with a foreign background student which ended with a negative outcome. Please include what do you think you could have done different?

Answer: I was very busy, and I didn't listen students' problem. I could have taken more serious about situation and tell student when we can meet with time. It's always a problem when you push student away to someone else without trying to solve a problem by yourself.

As previously noted, one of the consequences of not having sufficient time to meet the students, is that guidance counselors must assess the urgency of the case in order to select which student to see first. The following quote farther supports this acumen while also validating the insight that policy changes and time are important for the guidance counselor. When I asked how he/she could address this challenge the final word used would translate to "peace or tranquility"

Counselor: We are very important for our students. And we have to concentrate in our students. Sometimes I have the feeling that I don't. I have time for some, but not for them all. For example, if one student is very shy and he or she doesn't come to me.

AC: In order for you to address this challenge, what is it that you would need?
Counselor: Time, and not so much changes. "Rauha".

I will write in detail about counselors' experiences regarding time spent with students as part of their professional role in Section 4.2, which is focused on the findings concerning counselors and their interaction with students.

IV. Multiagency cooperation and change in the students' privacy policies

Occasionally, guidance counselors need to collaborate with other actors involved in the student's life, such as social workers, special needs teachers, nurses, psychologists, guardians, or employment office representatives. When a meeting takes place, being unsure of what is expected of each actor including themselves was reported. Furthermore, changes in privacy regulations concerning the information that may be disclosed about a student, hampers communication was a theme present as well. The following quotes illustrate how counselors depict multiagency cooperation.

And also, the regulations concerning the student's welfare services have changed in the last 10 years. They have become more strict and obligatory and I think very big part of my work nowadays relates to students' welfare and also the cooperation between the school social worker or the school nurse or such a people and also the problems or challenges of the students have become more various, and I think more complex too.

Another counselor said something similar and added, that these changes in the students' privacy policies have contributed to the confusion about the work division.

When you are working in a big a big school, it brings some other problems (...) It can be also that, who is going to write (this report). Is it special teacher? Is it a teacher? Or is it counselor? Who knows the student the most? (Counselor)

Another hindering factor produced by the policy changes is the change about the privacy of the students. It is reported that it hinders multi-agency cooperation even farther as the following quotes exemplify.

And sometimes I miss the times when it was easier, for example. Send information forward. Now we have lost, for example, that we cannot say the name of the student. Or something we have very. Yes privacy. It's a good thing. I understand it very well. But it was easier before, so I miss that time. (Counselor)

Yeah... and I think the main purpose would be always to concentrate on the student. Of course, the regulations are important, but I think, too much energy we have to use to think what we can say. Your what we can discuss with certain people. We should always concentrate on the student the most, not in regulations and things like that. But of course, I understand that the regulations are very important, and it is important to have those. But sometimes we counselors need to use too much energy and sometimes it is hinders the process. The way these (regulations) affect us is, that the way to your goal is not very straight. (Counselor)

Not all experiences about cooperation and communication with other parties are negative.

We have now organization between other schools. They have foreign students and immigrants, so we meet each other maybe once a month and we discuss about those things. So, it is not, not working alone. (Counselor)

To contextualize the importance of a smooth multi-agency cooperation protocol, I will next quote a counselor who thinks that seeking help from other professionals and cooperating, could prevent students from dropping out. I asked him/her to tell me about a challenging situation with an immigrant background student which ended up with a negative outcome and then I ask him/her to think retrospectively about what could have been done differently to achieve a positive outcome.

AC: Did I understand right? The challenging situation which ended up with a negative outcome is the number of dropouts and that you feel there is nothing you can do about it. In retrospective, what would you have done?

Counselor: Maybe more cooperation with other people. For example, if they are young, with their families or social worker. So, if I wait too long that I hear from the student, it maybe happens that I never will hear from him/her again, yeah, yes. So maybe I have to.... Cooperate, yeah. So that if I cannot reach the student, maybe I have to ask for help from some other people.

The next reported challenge by counselors is, the increased diversity in their roles and how vital it is for a counselor to continually revise and update their knowledge bank or database of information.

V. Diversification of roles and the need to keep up with the flux of information

By "role diversification" I refer to counselors performing extra functions which were not part of their original responsibilities. For example, more administrative

paperwork. Also, counselors note how students now have access to a broader range of educational opportunities which, in turn requires that the counselor keeps up with current with global educational trends. Educational opportunities are not the sole influx of information and changes that affects the role diversification of counselors as can be noted from the counselors' quotes.

The following is an example of the diversification of roles in which a guidance counselor had to learn different skills and provide information and services which were an addition to his/her job role as he/she knew it.

When I started, we had a lot of students from Russia and also from Europe. But in 2015 came many many refugees to Europe and also in our school it changes a lot because we have to organize different groups for different people. (...) It is quite different my job changed a lot. We had to learn about different cultures and also social work. It was so different. (...) Sometimes I am very tired after working day because it's happening so much in one in just one day. So, for example, the changes in studying possibilities. In Finland, they are changing fast every year. I have to learn; learn a lot and... I like learning but for example. If a student comes to me, and asks me, where he or she can study...for example, animal care or something. Then I don't know. I have to find the information every day. 10 years ago, it was somehow easier. I knew, I had a feeling I knew better everything because it didn't change so often. (Counselor)

Next quote exemplifies that the guidance counselors' need to be aware of more information which on itself is an added task that requires time.

A guidance counselor is a person who coordinates the guidance and counseling in institutions, so you need to be very much aware of about administrative things about systems about processes and about that kind of stuff and I guess we are nowadays doing more systematically about those kind of process in the school level (Counselor)

This third quote is an example of how the roles have change so much that this counselor is not performing the job roles that a is meant to be performing according to the counselor's perspective.

And, sometimes you realize that most of the tasks you have done during your workday they are not related to your main profession. (Counselor)

The following counselor explains confusion among staff members knowing clearly what their roles are which may result with the counselor being saddled with these additional responsibilities which have not been incorporated into any other job position or the counselor's schedule and time management plan.

If there would be other professionals working at the school because the role of a school counselor at the school is pretty flexible, so I think that if something happens that doesn't belong to anyone else, then very often, the school counselor is the person that helps in that kind of situation. (Counselor)

More administrative tasks, meaning paperwork, was also mentioned as a contributor to time management hindrances because of the policy changes.

Yeah, 2018 we also had to do a lot of administrative stuff. And also, at the same time do the counselling for the students. So, a lot of work (Counselor)

But about these changes. This change, it changes. It may be that much more. Yeah, much more administration. Much more writing also came to the counselor life. (Counselor)

In the next section, one more challenge reported because of the changes. In this case it applies just to Vocational Education

VI. Flexibility with student enrollment periods

As a result of policy changes, students can enroll in Vocational Education throughout the year. Individual learning plans are developed for the unique needs of the student. It used to be, before the reform, that all students started at once and counselling was more group based. The rationale for this pliability, is that everyone gets a study place after basic education as well as to adapt to the frequent changes in working life and the developments of the various industries. It is a successful solution for students and society. (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2019) This comes with the challenge that the time of the guidance counselor might not have been considered. Below I quote three counselors' reports of how this is affecting their time management.

My own time management must be the biggest thing because there was a big change in Vocational Education in 2018. They call it the "reform". The education system changed a lot in 2018 and also before that but especially after that year, many students go their very own path, their very own way they...f I say five years ago many students started at the same time and then they graduated at the same time and it was easier but now there is... this one starts there and this one starts the then they graduate at the same time, so I have to it's more complicated to...(Counselor)

And... for example, when students make applications for the schools. It is different than 10 years ago. In 10 years, most of them, it happened once a year that you could apply for a "opiskelupaikka". But now, it is continuously all throughout the year. So....no... it is changing every time of the year. (Counselor)

I, I think the counseling work has changed quite a lot from what it was when I began this work. At first it was more general, more about working with groups. It used to be that, in the beginning of August the groups came in, and after three years mainly, then they graduated at the end of May. And there might be somebody maybe 1-2 maximum, 3 perhaps? Who did some kind of a different kind of a personalized part in the studies, but most of those students were doing just exactly the same. At the same time, everybody. (Counselor)

The last of the identified challenges confronting counselors about administrative changes is addressed below.

VII. Schools growing

Schools getting bigger is seen as an unfavorable development which affects guidance counselors in diverse ways. I provide four separate instances below of how this is the case. For instance, they must be knowledgeable of additional procedures.

In some cases, the size of the schools has grown to more than 5 times the earlier number. So, it means that those processes are totally different and those are much more demanding that you need to be aware about the processes and you need to lead those processes in the school community and so on, so those kinds of demands are also growing. (Counselor)

This next counselor equates a bigger student body with more complex days.

We have been just smaller school, but now it's also now we have very, we are very big school. We have more than 1.000 students. And with a bigger student body also come with extra challenges. (Counselor)

The following counselor feels that it would be easier to have more agency if the schools were smaller:

If I would be in a smaller school I could make changes faster than I wouldn't need to ask for permission can I do this can I do that, can I do a new routine... like this... so so to have more autonomy that is something I like and that is something we are losing when community size is getting bigger so that kind of bureaucracy and slow processes, that is something that I don't like much. (Counselor)

One last reason mentioned for which schools' expansion in size is viewed negatively is the loss of a sense of community and belonging.

The numbers of students in the schools have grown and I don't like that (...) it loses kind of that feeling of belonging and feeling of community (...) I think schools should be a community where you can at least know by face every fellow student every teacher and so on. (Counselor)

4.2 Interaction with students: What guidance counselors enjoy the most about their jobs, Personal qualities counselors consider essential in their profession

This section relates to the second research question: (RQ2): What factors do counselors consider important in their counselling roles?

I divided this section into two subsections. First, I will talk about what counselors like the most about their job and/or find the most interesting. Secondly, I write about components of a counselor's job which counselors identified as being especially important and the personal characteristics and/or skills counselors consider essential to have, to be an effective professional in their field. This section follows the same structure as the previous one. After this introduction, a table with the thematized answers of the counselors and their frequencies follows. The last part is composed of the findings showed in the tables being exemplified with the direct quotes from the counselors.

4.2.1 What counselors find most interesting about their profession and like the most

In this section I present the findings from the interviews about what guidance counselors report makes their job interesting and what are those things that they like the most.

Table 4.2.1 *Guidance Counselors' (n=13) responses indicating what motivates counselors, what they like the most and what they find interesting in their job roles.*

Response	f
I. Direct interaction with students, to help, individual counselling	13
II. Feeling a personal sense of accomplishment. Realizing that one's work is meaningful when succeeding at helping the student	8
III. Meeting a variety of people and learning from the students	8

I. Direct interaction with students, to help, individual counselling.

Thirteen out of thirteen counselors expressed how the best part of their job was the interaction with the students.

The following excerpt is from a questionnaire. The counselor listed the following things when answering the question about what she likes the most about her job.

I think, the most important, and also what I like the most in my work, is the individual counseling. When, I feel that I have these 45 minutes for this certain student, and I can concentrate in just him or her. That time is the most important and also what I like the most in my work. always when I can do this individual counseling... face to face counseling with a student, and one student at one time.... So, I always think that This is why I am doing this work of school counseling (Counselor)

Another counselor said:

The discussions with the students, the... I like everything when I interact with the students. I like teaching and having the conversations during the education and ah... I like meeting the students when they come to see me as a counselor or a teacher and to discuss about their choices on future plans and everything. (Counselor)

And one last example about how counselors enjoy the most to spend time with students.

I love my job. I think this is a top job. I really, really like that so, I don't have that many minuses. What I like most is obviously when we find out the solution that is good for the students in the situation he or she is at the moment. I really like to work with the teenagers and young adults and thinking with them what they need to be doing next and how we are? What kind of plans we are making and and seeing them succeed. (Counselor)

II. Feeling a personal sense of accomplishment, realizing that one's work is meaningful when succeeding at helping the student

Eight out of thirteen counselors expressed during the interview to feel accomplished and fulfilled with their job because they are helping a student. The following quotes illustrate this.

Counselling everyday... every time that the students go out of my office, and they are satisfied, it is a very good feeling, when you can help somebody. This is the best. And after that, when the school has finished and I am at the shop or somewhere after many years, they come to me, and they remember me and say- "oh hey! Thank you for everything". This is the best. (Counselor)

I think sometimes, I think that.... I feel that those students are really grateful and they're really in the need of....I don't know if the right word is. In the need of help and counseling in this their situation at that moment. So, I think the work I do is very meaningful then and I can find the reason why I do this work is very easy to find then. (Counselor)

After working for some time (probably years) I began to feel I had collected myself quite a lot of knowledge of different cultures and especially how the cultural background affected the everyday life. Being able to understand without asking explanations was always a delight to myself. (Counselor)

III. Meeting a variety of people and learning from the students

Eight out of thirteen counselors listed meeting a diverse group of people, as an aspect of their job that they enjoy. Additionally, learning from the students was listed as something they like or find interesting.

There are many things I liked (one of them was) Almost every day I met new students and sometimes their parents. I also found these contacts always very interesting, because of the great variety of students from different cultures and backgrounds. (Counselor)

I like to meet different people from different life situations (Counselor)

I like that it's pretty interesting and I work with people with different ages and from different cultures it's so interesting. That's it, I like this. I'm never tired of meeting new people (Counselor)

I also think I learn much about them (students) so that it is so important and so interesting work. (Counselor)

Yeah, students are teaching us all that all the time. Yeah, every day. (Counselor)

4.2.2 Personal qualities, skills and performed tasks which are considered essential by counselors to be an effective practitioner

This section summarizes the findings of traits and characteristics outlined by counselors as vital in their occupation. The explanatory terms that best exemplified this section of the results were, first, communication skills, and second, empathy. Owing to the wide variety of answers I will limit the counselor quotations to only two in each section.

Table 4.2.2 *Counselors' (n=13) responses indicating the personal qualities, skills and performed tasks which are considered essential by counselors to be an effective practitioner.*

Response	f
I. Skill of listening and being present, versatile communication skills	11
II. Empathy	9
III. Availability, time to spend with the student	8
IV. Cooperation with other actors, networking	6
V. Being open minded and inquisitive	6
VI. Knowing "accepting" that the student makes all the decisions	6
VII. To use self-reflection	5
VIII. To empower and support the student	4
IX. To be flexible and have tolerance for uncertainty	3

I. Skill of listening and being present, versatile communication skills

The ability to communicate effectively was cited by eleven counselors as a key competence for a practitioner to be efficient. Some specific things not illustrated in the quotes, were, the ability to put things in a simpler version if the student

does not understand, no judgmental attitudes, to give the students space until they feel comfortable enough to approach the counselor, to listen and to be able to focus fully in the present moment and set aside all other thoughts or tasks that the counselor might be thinking of.

The skills of ask the right questions: "tell me more about what happened..." or "what your family suggested...", to listen actively and offer support (Counselor)

skill of course to listen, to be present. Even though you have in your head a lot of tasks that should be getting done pretty soon. But when you have a student and he or she has some kind of issue. You should have some kind of button that stops all the other noise and thoughts which are there. The skill to concentrate in one issue at the time. (Counselor)

II. Empathy

Besides empathy, closely related traits were mentioned, such as sensitivity, and looking at the students holistically by being informed about the students' background.

The ability to listen and to hear what the other is saying - not only the words, but his/her feelings? Deeper thoughts? (Counselor)

And empathy so that you can find the perspective and the meaning behind someone else's actions. (Counselor)

III. Availability, time to spend with the student

Counselors wish they would have more time to spend with the student. They consider an important part of their work environment that the student has ease of reaching their office. To be approachable and inspire trust in the student was also mentioned. Below there are two quotes which illustrate some of the above mentioned.

So, uhm. I think that I was thinking that the best is to be like.... All the time when students need me to be to be there for them when they want to ask something.... Wanted to discuss and to be like easy to, to.... To get to help them with everything. (Counselor)

I think with young people it would be especially important to have time for them when they have their question and when they have the question in their mind. spontaneous questions or...students they come and... they have many different kinds of questions. So usually, you don't have enough time for those (Counselor)

IV. Cooperation with other actors, networking

Six counselors acknowledged that it is essential to cooperate with other professionals and/or family members involved in the student's life. This is also what seven out of the thirteen counselors report not having time enough for.

The important part of the work is kind of a cooperating or networking. The diplomatic touch with everybody because the counselor is kind of a net builder there between.... Anything. (Counselor)

I feel that it is a pity that we do not have welfare services for adult students in general upper secondary school for adults. So, it means that I have to act as a social worker, psychology etc. Of course, it is needed and also somehow good that we meet students very holistic way, but it could be also good to have professional Network around me. (Counselor)

V. Being open-minded and inquisitive

In this section the theme of having intrinsic motivation and sincere interest in continuous learning was noted. Willingness to explore new sources of information and being resourceful at acquiring new skills were mentioned. Being enthusiastic about meeting and helping others.

I think we have to be interested in different things and different people. So wide interest. We have to be interested in so many things. It is important. And you have to be, well, I think we have to be social. Not maybe so talkative or a very active, but we meet so many different people every day that it is important to be social. (Counselor)

"uteliaisuus" open-mindedness? That I suppose is one of the key qualities I would say. Because that is the only way how you can follow your time and follow the things that are just happening, and also analyze the future by the curiosity because working life is changing a lot so technology is like really reforming our societies and they are so many things happening that you cannot be aware unless you have a lot of curiosity of human nature, of technology about globalization about lots of stuff so that is definitely one. (Counselor)

VI. Knowing, "accepting" that the student makes all the decisions

To recognize and accept that, the student is accountable for his or her decisions was mentioned 6 times among the 13 counselors. Being self-reliant is a skill that counselors encourage in students. Counselors must trust that students are making the proper choices, even if the counselor would have been inclined towards a different outcome.

To trust that the student and his or her family, they are the ones who will do the decisions related to their lives. Sometimes you may feel that other decisions would be better, but you need to.... It is related to responsibility. When they do the decisions, they also carry their responsibilities and sometimes it happens that it will not.... The outcomes might not be pretty good, or ideal. But it is important to trust that they do the best decision in their life's. (Counselor)

The student makes the decisions. I only kind of serve the possibilities that you may do this or this or this, but I never say that I think you should do that way because I think that's in their own responsibility and that's what I try to tell them too that this is how I am working, but I am telling you options and you tell me which one you choose and then we can come back to the thing afterwards, and we can think if it was a good decision or no but we are teaching them to be part of the workers in a work life, so I think it's part of the counseling ideology that that we teach them to take responsibility of their own choices. (Counselor)

VII. To use self-reflection

As part of their ongoing professional development, counselors reflect on their daily activities and the experiences they encounter.

You know...in this job every day you think the same, it is not only one situation, even if it is a good situation, and it is only counselling and everything is ok but when the students go out from my office, I think all the time if I was understanding (I ask myself) because I work with foreigners. Did the student understand everything? what can I do? Was I good explaining everything? Was there a different possibility? These questions I tell myself every day. (Counselor)

And when you ask yourself all the time what kind of counselor I am. What is a good counselor? You have to prove yourself all the time and think what the best for this person is. To really think. (Counselor)

VIII. To empower and support the student

To have an encouraging attitude in general and to empower the student was a theme in the interviews.

To empower the young people to overcome negative thoughts or misunderstanding of their talents and possibilities, to give support to the problem solutions (Counselor)

To let the student/client shine, and if they aren't shining, helping them to shine (Counselor)

IX. To be flexible and have tolerance for uncertainty

Flexibility took several meanings when mentioned by the counselors, besides the examples below.

Once way in which counselors depicted the skill of flexibility was as the ability to adapt and respond the dynamic environment around them. Like sudden changes in priorities and unforeseen events.

Flexibility was also named as skill in the context of being able to apply one's competences and resources, in diverse ways depending on the students' unique needs.

Flexibility, tolerance of uncertainty too. Also, being comfortable with not knowing beforehand what the right way is to continue with the student. (Counselor)

Flexibility, I mean that for example, each client is going to be different and have their own background and experiences, so (flexibility means) to recognize, to understand that not every student can be good everywhere. Being able to communicate when things aren't working, and for example, it is very difficult. (Counselor)

4.3 Working with diverse groups of students: Counselors' perspectives on whether there are differences between counseling students of immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds.

This section relates to the third research question. (RQ3): How do counsellors see the role of student's cultural background in counselling?

I sought to examine two topics in this part. The first one is, the counselors' perspectives on whether students of immigrant origin have dissimilar needs or questions than students of Finnish background. The second, how do counselors incorporate cultural factors during the counselling interaction with an immigrant background student.

Table 4.3 *Counselors'(n=13) How counselors see the role of students' cultural background in the counseling interaction.*

Response	f
Counselor is aware of the significance of cultural competences and additional/unique needs that an immigrant background student might have.	7
Fluency in Finnish as a factor for taking into consideration the student's cultural background.	2
Contradictory statements: "There are no differences between students from immigrant backgrounds and Finnish born students" later "Students from immigrant backgrounds have different questions or needs.	2

I. Counselor is aware of the significance of cultural competencies

In the preliminary stages of the analysis, the first overarching impression was that most of the counselors preferred to regard each student as an individual, overlooking the fact that the student's cultural background plays a role in how the counseling relationship unfolds. However, as the analysis progressed, excerpts from the interviews were analyzed holistically rather than sentence by sentence. It became evident that contextual background was lacking in the first cycles of the analysis and that the language barrier between the counselors and myself may have contributed to that perspective. However, this section has issue with the validity of the data due to the number of times I had to ask a question and the amount of prompts I gave with my examples to the counselors for them to understand why I insisted on differentiating between groups and not just focusing on the person as an individual. I elaborate on this in the discussion section. Next, to illustrate the findings, there are three examples below which undoubtedly show how counselors use intercultural skills in their job and how there is widespread understanding of intercultural competencies as a tool within most of the sample I interviewed.

It's very interesting, it's a very rich atmosphere and content to work with immigrants' students. You can always learn something from them. And background cultures are so different, so you need to be very aware about the meanings, about your own behavior, that you won't be for example disrespectful in some way that is not your intention. (Counselor)

In 2015 came many refugees to Europe and also in our school it changes a lot because we have to organize different groups for different people (...) And they also needed different social services. Because when people come from the war or from refugee camps, it's different than if your life is in good condition and you just moved to Finland. It is quite different my job changed a lot. We had to learn about diverse cultures and also social work. It was so different. (...) If the student doesn't the speak Finnish or English, it's not easy, but I like it anyway. (We communicate) with drawings for example. (Counselor)

And one last example:

AC: How do you incorporate cultural factors into your counseling?

Counselor: I try to use culturally sensitive counseling emphasizes understanding of the student's background, ethnicity, and belief system. I try to recognize and respect differences in opinions, attitudes and values of various cultures and different types of people.

AC: What specific qualities do you think, every single counselor should have?

Counselor: Understanding, for example multicultural issues, because every client is different and has their own background and experiences

AC: What do you like the most about interacting with students as a school counselor? *

Counselor: After working for some time (probably years) I began to feel I had collected myself quite a lot of knowledge of different cultures and especially how the cultural background affected the everyday life. Being able to understand without asking explanations was always a delight to myself.

II. Fluency in Finnish as a factor for taking into consideration the student's cultural background

My interpretation of the following quotes is that the level of Finnish language of the student seems to be a predictor of the acculturation level of the student. Below are two examples.

AC: Could you tell me more about how you find the interaction with immigrant students.

Counselor: I think it's nice to see the motivation it's usually very good towards the school and studying and the difficulties sometimes, yes, the language. Finnish is a very hard language and studies are in Finnish in our school. We don't have English education. Well,

we don't have vocational studies in English it's always a Finnish. So yeah, sometimes the language is the problem. Well, I wouldn't say a problem I would say a challenge. But it's also very nice to see when the language goes very fast better and better and better.

AC: Is that all you want to tell me about the interaction?

Counselor: Well yeah, otherwise I think the interaction is the same no matter if the student is immigrant or Finnish. No matter where he or she comes from. And also, there are challenges with Finnish students so. It's not always the immigrants or the multicultural things that challenges. (Counselor)

And the second quotation follows.

A foreign student. If his or her Finnish skills are good, then it's going to be all good. It's just like any other student. I don't see any difference or any extra challenges just because he or she is a foreign person. But if the Finnish skills... if the language skills are poor... That brings a lot of difficulties and lot of challenges. (Counselor)

III. Contradictory statements: "There are no differences between students of immigrant background and students of non-immigrant background" followed by "Immigrant background students have unique concerns or needs."

When I asked two of the counselors straight forward about the differences between counseling immigrant and non-immigrant background students, they said there were none. However later in the interview they would talk about the differences either when I asked the question in a different way or when I was specific about the differences I was referring to. Given that I, the interviewer, and the interviewees (counselors) were both using English as a second language, there is a possibility that this was a miscommunication occurrence. Below is an example of what I mean by contradictory statements.

AC: And how do you find interaction with immigrant students? Are there any challenges and can you list positive things and things that are more challenging (with a foreign student than with a Finnish student?

Counselor: As I told you as I told you from beginning, uh, that for me what is very important that for me it's the same who is coming to my room. Is she/he an immigrant? It doesn't matter.

(...)

Same counselor later on the interview: When I tell you that the way we handle our students is the same, we in do in the way we treat them. But really immigrants.... takes you much more time. You need much more time. Yeah, preparation.

And a second example.

Counselor: I don't see the immigrant students as immigrant students. I think they that that they are just individuals like any other and they have individual problems as well.

(...)

Same counselor later on the interview:

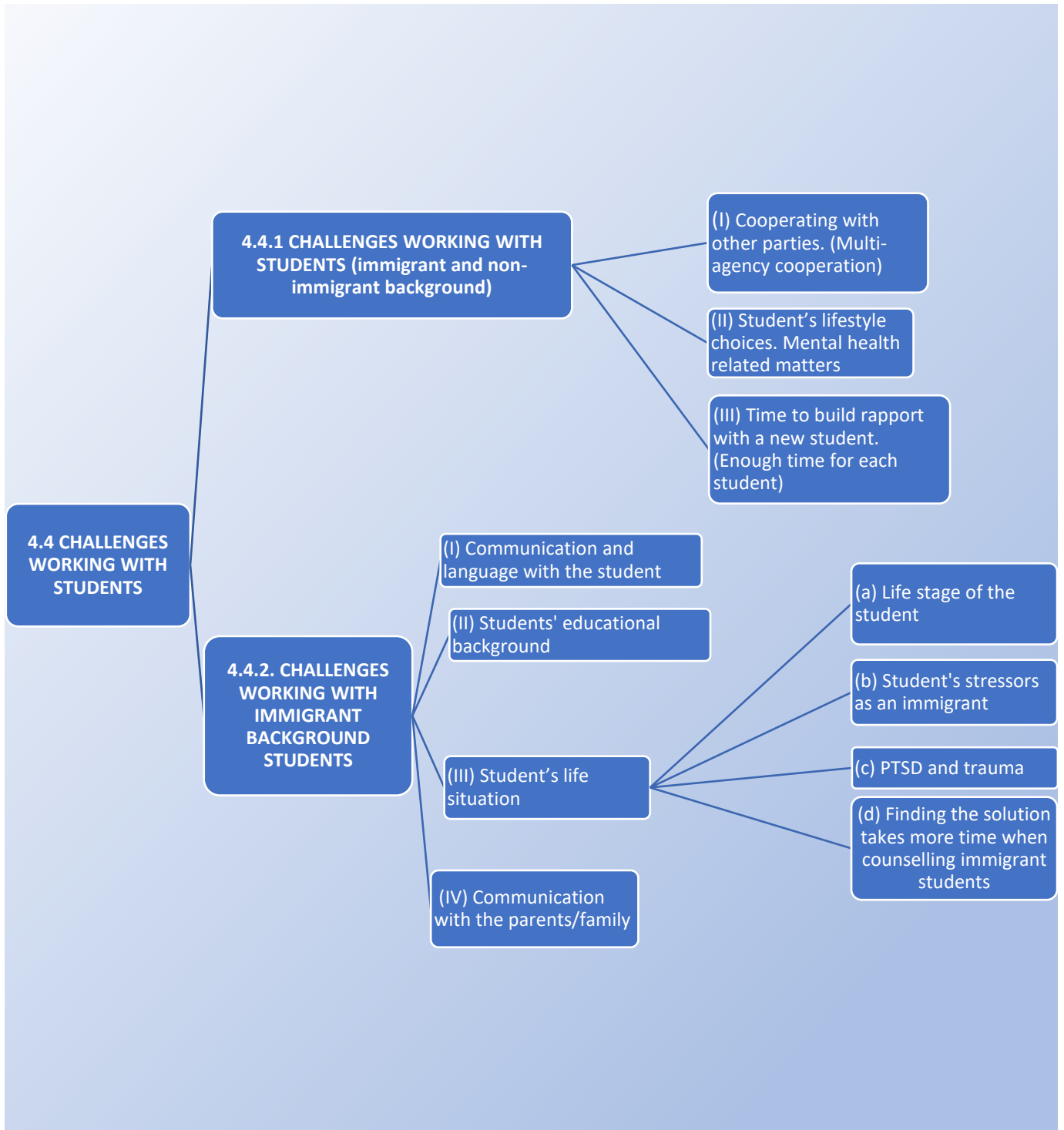
If, uh, for example with the foreign students, it may take a little bit longer time, so I may say that, OK, well, we meet now, and we think this, and then we arrange a new meeting for next week for example. And meantime you are thinking this and this and this. So, we take more time there between because sometimes they have to work with the thoughts longer, to see what they need to do next or how they are moving with the studies.

4.4 Challenges working with students

This section relates to the fourth research question. (RQ4): How do counsellors see the role of students' background affecting the challenges they experience?

Section 4.4 covers a large amount of material. I begin this final part with a flow chart to help with legibility. Afterwards, I go in order describing the themes from each part of the chart in the subsections. I start every sub-section with a frequency table.

Chart Section 4.4 Challenges *working with students*.



Firstly, in section 4.4.1 I will summarize the guidance counselors' descriptions about challenges experienced when working with students from immigrant and non-immigrant background. Then, in section 4.4.2 I will do the same but with students from immigrant background students only.

4.4.1 Challenges working with students from immigrant and non-immigrant background

Explained below are the challenges counselors mentioned to have with students from immigrant and non-immigrant background

Table 4.4.1 *Counselors' (n=13) challenges working with students from immigrant and non-immigrant background)*

Response	f
Cooperating with other parties. (Multi-agency cooperation)	4
Enough time to build rapport with a new student	4
Student's lifestyle choices, Mental health related matters	3

I. Cooperating with other parties. (Multi-agency cooperation)

Multi-agency cooperation was mentioned as it relates to challenges in working with students efficiently. Counselors said that the communication channels hindered the way they could help the students. At the same time, networking and cooperation were highlighted by the counselors as core competences as I wrote about in section 4.1. (IV. Multiagency cooperation and change in the students' privacy policies.)

The challenges about the aforementioned factors were mostly due to organization between the different actors involved in the students' life and a lack of clear understanding of the role of each person involved in the process.

II. Enough time to build rapport with a new student

Time management has been discussed in section 4.1 “Policy reforms & changes. Counselors describe their experiences and challenges” in subsection III. “Time for meeting with the students is insufficient”. I mention it here again because I allude to it now as a challenge as it relates to working with students and not as a challenge as it relates to the policy reforms aftermath.

Well, most of the work I do at school, is with the students who are in the end of their studies. I think One case comes to my mind I should.... I think I should have had more time with a student in the very beginning of his/her studies. I think if we had got familiar with each other and discussed more... already in the beginning, so it would have been much easier (for the student) to.... end his/her studies It would be very important here to get to know each other also in the very beginning of the studies.... If you think that... Well, well, well with all the students, of course, but especially with those students who you think that may have some kind of challenges in during their studies. The challenge is that under negative outcome relates to challenges in school and studies. But, uh, if you gain that the students trust already in the beginning, then if he or she faces problems in studies, usually he or she also have some kind of challenges in other areas of life then, if you already have the trust, then it's very much easier to solve or to discuss the problems with the student when he or she faces the challenges so. (Counselor)

Also lack of time, but also lack of knowing what the student needs if he or she doesn't say it. Find then so it could be that afterwards he or she says I didn't get any information from my student counselor. We don't meet each other so that I don't know what he or she needs and if he/she cannot describe it to me, then he or she is alone with the future planning. (Counselor)

It is important to be interested in the person. Every student is an individual. Getting to know everybody as well as possible and using time for that, makes an important basis for being able to advise someone or make decisions about choosing which options to introduce and explain (Counselor)

III. Student's lifestyle choices, Mental health related matters

The Lifestyle habits of the students are challenges for the guidance counselors as well, as these factors affect students' success. For example, substance abuse, unbalance sleeping habits or unsuitable lifestyle habits in general. A guidance counselor explained that – in some cases, it is not that simple to get the students the help they need. Regardless of whether guidance counselors can see that a student does not feel good, e, g., is tired or absent often, the resources the guidance counselor has to offer to the student are limited. Another guidance counselor refers also to mental health by saying that more mental health issues

are seen in the student body compared to earlier and that students might take more sick leaves nowadays than before. In addition, another guidance counselor reports that, sometimes motivating the students to persist with their studies is not enough, hinting mental problems as the cause for this.

Yes, when they interrupt their education, a lot of them is because they have a personal problem, and sometimes I try to motivate them a lot you know, to give them options but students own energy...and after that I think, maybe it was better if would have done more, but then after that I think I can't push. If the student is burned out, I can't push more, even I try but I always say, if you plan to come back contact me, when you feel better. In vocational school I told you a lot of problems are personal problems and health problems maybe. This is the reason why they stop their education or interrupt it for some time. (Counselor)

Maybe there are a little bit more health issues. For example, students are away for a while and then coming back. Mostly with something mental (health) issues if they have to take a break with the studies. (Counselor)

Yeah, the most maybe is when you can see that you can't help someone. Because of course you can't help someone if he/she doesn't help himself. They are for example, there has been a few students. that for example, you can see that they do not feel well. Maybe psychological problems? Or you can see that a student is getting tired or getting lost. Typically, this kind of problems, you really they need some other help. -For example, in (name of the city) they are going then to the school doctor when they have very big problems. But also, in there, not everyone can handle to get there at the right time. Yeah, and sometimes when they can't go to the school doctor, they are coming back to our school. (Counselor)

4.4.2 Challenges working with immigrant-background students.

This section is formed of four subsections. The frequency table systematically follows the main chart above – Chart Section 4.4 challenges working with students –. Afterwards I give examples and explain as needed of each of the subsections.

Table 4.4.2 *Guidance counselors' (n=13) Challenges working with immigrant background students*

Response	f
I. Communication and language	12
II. The students' educational background	4
III. Student's life situation:	
(a) Life stage of the student	2
(b) Student's stressors as an immigrant.	2
(c) PTSD and trauma	3
(d) Finding the solution takes more time when counselling students from immigrant backgrounds	3
IV. Intercultural communication and relations.	4

I. Communication and language with the student

Guidance counselors explained how the level of Finnish language affects the student in the following areas: Successful communication between guidance counselor and counselee during the counseling interaction, counseling becomes a slower process if Finnish language of the student is not fluent, finishing the studies might take longer. Lastly becoming a Finnish citizen was mentioned too.

But, uh, there have been some sad stories with the students, and they have been having such a poor language skills. That it has been impossible to get the whole qualification done. And in Finland, if you are an immigrant and you want to have a finished citizenship, you need the whole qualification there with the application. It is kind of a dead end at that time. (Counselor)

And also, the Finnish skills, they vary a lot and sometimes it is difficult to communicate because we don't have common language and it is a lot slower. (Counselor)

In Finland, I think that the most important thing is the language and how you can, how well you can speak and understand Finnish. That is the main question in both in good and bad situations. If the language skills are poor... That brings a lot of difficulties and lot of challenges. And then there is not that much that the counselor can do. (Counselor)

II. The students' educational background

Having a diverse group of students when it comes to their educational background was reported to pose a challenge for guidance counselors. The need for individual learning plans, as well as the planning for additional courses were mentioned among the guidance counselors' experiences. The following three quotations exemplify this.

On our school, we have other problems. For example, students that come and they do not know how to read and write. They don't know even in their own language. For example, next year, I really don't know what we are going to do. Maybe we will have some new special teacher who is going to make own small group with students which can't. (Read and write). You cannot be in 7,8, 9 grade and to study biology, chemistry, physics when you can't read and write. (Counselor)

I think the biggest challenge is related to, the different kind of educational backgrounds. They, they are not used to use some kind of, for example this Wilma, or this kind of IT tools. Sometimes they lack off like this basic, uhm... skills that we have in our society. They have well different kind of skills that we don't have, in our society. That if a student comes to our country and he or she he or she does not have a...He or she has not gone to school during the last few years. How we could plan? It's a rush like studies in a way that. Because this in in our school system in a way that would be the best for him or her course, uh? First, his or her skills may be pretty low, but of course we understand that we, uh, he or she. Well, the students has a right to study with the students who are in the same age than he or she is, the student is, so sometimes it's very difficult to give them the support they need and to organize their studies. (Counselor)

For example, there are people that have, no qualifications or no studies behind them if they came for example from countries with war. They could not read in their own language or write...not even English. No nothing... no other...ah. And then we had to start groups for quite simple things, writing ABCD it was different with European people. With very good qualifications because they only needed Finnish language. (Counselor)

III. Student's life situation.

In this part there are four subsections: (a) Life Stage of the Student, (b) Student's stressors as an immigrant, (c) PTSD and trauma, (d) Finding the solution takes more time when counselling students from immigrant backgrounds. Each

subsection addresses a specific issue met by the immigrant student as seen on table 4.4.2

(a) Life Stage of the Student

- According to developmentalists, migration can negatively shape the life stage development in the case of refugees, or young adults due to the immigration process not being by choice. (Fingerman K, Berg C. et al., 2011). A guidance counselor mentioned that the life stage of the student, is on itself a factor which affects the immigration experience.

One thing that comes to my mind, I think, this relates to the "elämänvaihe" What is it in English? Of the stage of the life of the students 13 to 16. And if the family moves to another country at that stage of life, so it maybe, it may...affect many kinds of... it affects some kind of problems with the puberty and the growing and so on. If the environment changes in that stage of life, it may affect the challenges for this kind of people so, sometimes I think that the challenges happen because of this kind of changes in life, and I think... I do not know, if I can say most of the... at least many situations in which I need to cooperate with the social workers of the welfare services at school many of the situations comes from this kind of situation when moving to another country has happened in this stage of life. In the beginning I mentioned that mostly I work with the students who are in the age of from 13 to 16 and if they move to Finland or to another country in that phase of life that may, uh, affect them, affect some kind of challenges. (Counselor)

Another guidance counselor alludes to the life stage by pinpointing how each stage of life (in this case that one of an adult) comes with its own set of characteristics which are added factors to being a student and an immigrant.

I mean, if you are all already kind of a grown-up person and you have a family and so and you only want to work and get the work quickly. So, I have had been these kind of immigrant students so they kind of do not have time. And they have children at home, and you know, they have a wife and so.... They just want to get a job, and to get it now, to survive with their family. And I cannot get them without a qualification because they don't know Finnish enough to get. It is really hard. This is the kind of a thing where we can end up with a negative situation. (Counselor)

(b) Student's stressors as an immigrant

Challenges for an immigrant student may include financial constraints, the occasional encounter with racism and prejudice, a lack of internships/work opportunities, or distressing dealings with public institutions. (Sue & Sue, 2015)

There were lots of students that never graduated, but usually there was a reason outside school. In the family, in the employment office or similar. Reason the most to put systems in place if we are aware of this". (Counselor)

And of course, their own life sometimes can be so confused that they do not have the power to study, they are out of school a lot. We try to motivate them, but the family problems they are so big sometimes they must stop the education. Ok, Finnish ppl they have the same problems as foreigners but because of the language and because of the different culture, maybe in this kind of group is twice more problems like in Finnish groups. This is very, for

(c) PTSD and trauma

Another factor which makes the immigrant student have unique needs is being an immigrant as a result of seeking asylum. In other words, being a refugee. Trauma is something to be aware of since the person is escaping war or another life-threatening situation. The effects of trauma are likely to be amplified by the difficulties associated with adjusting to a new reality. Atrocities of war, sexual assault, imprisonment, and the prospect of death are among the premigration experiences of many refugees. (Sue & Sue, 2015). This guidance counselor gave an example of her experience regarding the refugee experience.

One difficult thing occurring in the discussions was the refugee background of many foreign students. Sometimes they were depressed and traumatic for what they had experienced. There were a few who told me how they were hunted, somebody tried to kill them, and their family and they had to hide and get away. This was hard. It is always hard to understand people who have experiences something you have not. What can you say to a student who has been the victim of indescribable horrors? (Counselor)

(d) Finding the solution takes more time when counseling students from an immigrant background

Language is the main reason why counseling students from immigrant backgrounds takes longer according to guidance counselors. Additionally, educator and advocate are two roles that guidance counselors must undertake while working with students from immigrant backgrounds. Providing information about health care, social security or employment systems are some examples of these. The need for the guidance counselor to provide this information, will assist immigrants in acquiring not only education and training for themselves and their children, but also knowledge of employment

opportunities, job search skills, resources about financial assistance to support their studies, and extra language courses. All these do naturally take time. (Sue & Sue, 2015)

Finnish students, we have the same language. It is easier to explain everything.
(Counselor)

With the foreign students, it may take a little bit longer time, so I may say that, OK, well, we meet now, and we think this, and then we arrange a new meeting for next week for example. (Counselor)

When I tell you that the way we handle our students is the same, we in do in the way we treat them. But really immigrants.... takes you much more time. You need much more time. Yeah, preparation. (Counselor)

IV. Intercultural communication and relations.

Another challenge reported by guidance counselors about working with students from immigrant backgrounds, is communication with parents about the Finnish educational system. Also, the extent to which the parents of the students participate in their children's career planning can be challenging for the guidance counselor too.

One guidance counselor mentioned experiences with parents who already have a career path in mind for their children. However, the student might have a different vision of what his/her future might look like. Additionally, following the parents' plan may not be feasible within the time bracket of the school's syllabus.

Ok, for example if I have a student who is struggling with math and physics and chemistry and his or her parents are very willing to give them and very well paid and secure profession, with no any changes or any harm in the career life. And the parent is forcing the student in a way so the student is taking all the extra optional courses in those subjects, and I can see that the student is struggling a lot and not liking those options but wants to be a good kid for the parents. And in that way trying to please the parent so in that kind of situation, they are very challenging for me as a guidance counselor. Because I think in Finnish context it is the student's path that we are supporting, not the parent's path that we are supporting. So that is an example of conflict, and the good result is that we can have a conversation about the future with the whole family and yeah we can find a solution that Finland is liberal and opened paradise of education, and that you will always have different work life paths and career options, and that those are always good. And the point is that the student finds its own path and feels confident and feels that it is a pleasure to follow that path. So, that is a good solution. (Counselor)

5 DISCUSSION

The first subsection, 5.1 is divided into 4 subsections, one for each area of the research. There, I summarize the main insights of my results and list other studies related to those. In the second subsection 5.2, I discuss the implications of the results. And in the last subsection, 5.3 I write about the recommendations for further research and the recommendations suggested by the guidance counselors.

5.1 Summary of results and comparison with previous findings in similar studies.

This qualitative study yields insights on guidance counselor's experiences in 4 different areas of their professional life's:

RQ1: How do guidance counselors describe the effects of administrative changes in their job and what challenges are they experiencing as a result?

RQ2: What factors do guidance counselors consider important in their counselling roles?

RQ3: How do counsellors see the role of student's cultural background in counselling?

RQ4: How do counsellors see the role of students' background affecting the challenges they experience.

5.1.1 Guidance counselors describe the effects of policy changes in their job

When guidance counselors were asked about the impact of legislative changes on their professional lives, these were the responses with the higher frequencies: The counselor-to-student ratio being too high, time management challenges in general and insufficient time to meet with the students.

Counselor-to-student ratio.

When it comes to the ratio counselor-to-student, there was consensus among the guidance counselors I interviewed that this was not necessarily something that stemmed from the recent policy changes but something that has been part of their career from the beginning.

The data from prior research differs significantly; while some guidance counselors reported a favorable counselor-to-student ratio, in many cases, there were too many students per guidance counselor. (Lairio & Puukari, 1999) Given that SOPO deems 1:200 in Upper Secondary Education and Vocational Schools to be a sustainable counselor-to-student ratio, we can infer from research conducted in 1999, that the number of students per guidance counselor was already unbalanced. (SOPO ry, 2022). According to the study referenced above, out of 230 school guidance counselors in Upper secondary schools, 42% had maximum 200 students, and 58% over 200. From 229 guidance counselors in Vocational schools 39% had maximum 200 students and 61% had over 200 students. (Lairio, Puukari & Varis 1999)

Overall time management and time allocation to meet with the students

Struggles with time management, and difficulties with the completion of key tasks were reported. Those key tasks were also referred to by guidance counselors as being the most enjoyable, for example, spending time with the student/individual counseling. Guidance counselors reported a continual sense of urgency, being constantly pressed for time and working outside scheduled hours.

In an article named "Towards networking in counselling: A follow-up study of Finnish school counselling" (Lairio & Nissilä, 2002). Lack of time as a resource was the number 1 listed problem in both 1990 and 1997 when comparing the main Problems Related to Work of School Counsellors. 338 guidance counselors out of 1231 in 1990 and 449 in 1997 saw this as their main problem at work.

Supporting my findings about guidance counselors having insufficient time to meet with the student Halonen (2020) reported on guidance counselors' experience of providing adequate student counselling in upper-secondary schools:

More than two thirds (72%) of the respondents state that they do not have enough time for student counselling during the mandatory upper secondary school student counselling courses (Halonen 2020, p.26)

5.1.2 Factors which guidance counselors consider important in their professional roles: Motivational factors and qualities perceived as essential four counseling.

According to my results, when it comes to guidance counselors' job roles, what they like most and what they find motivational about their job is to have direct interaction with their students, see their students succeed and the sense of personal accomplishment that comes with it. The essential skills and qualities the guidance counselors I interviewed listed were good communication skills, having time for the student/being available, cooperating/network with other actors involved in the students' life.

Lairio & Nissilä (2002) noted the following results: When respondents were asked - What tasks do you consider to be core tasks of school counselling? In 1990 out of 1408 guidance counselors who responded 28% replied Supporting growth and development, the same question was asked in 1997 and out of the 3123 respondents 40% gave the same answer. Study and career counselling were 67% in 1990 and 46% in 1997 and networking inside the school was an answer given by 5% in 1990 and 6% in 1997. Additionally in 1997, 5% of the guidance counselors listed networking outside the school as a core task of their profession as well.

In my study individual counseling or spending time with the student was the number one task that the guidance counselors liked to do and was listed as the third most important task that the guidance counselors considered essential. Named in my study; "having time for the student/being available". Additionally, the study by Lairio & Nissilä (2002) yields the following insights:

When guidance counselors were asked “estimate how your working time as a counsellor is distributed between the following tasks during one school year” in 1990, among 1080 guidance counselors the M was 25% of the time was spent in individual counseling in 1997 out of a 1119 guidance counselors the M was 31% the amount of time spent on networking in and outside the school was M=22% in 1990 and M=21% in 1997.

5.1.3 Guidance counselors’ perceptions of the role of students’ cultural background in counseling.

It is not possible to draw strong conclusions out of my research in this area. 7 out of 13 the guidance counselors I interviewed or surveyed, indicated to be aware of the value of cultural competences and of the additional/unique needs that an immigrant background student might have. Yet, the answers were not immediately overt from all and I had to reframe the topic in several contexts to elicit unambiguous responses. Because of this, I cannot ascertain the extent into which I influenced the guidance counselors’ answers.

I found resistance from the guidance counselors to engage directly on the topic of counseling students from immigrant backgrounds when I addressed them as a separate group. By a separate group I mean that I made a distinction between Finnish born background students and students from an immigrant background. Grouping and labeling are necessary in order to acknowledge the different needs that immigrant background students may have. Guidance counselors insisted on addressing every student as an individual and I had to explain how one does not negate the other. Vehviläinen & Souto (2021) note how several studies including their own have shown that guidance counselors are cautious to engage in the subject of race, ethnicity, and gender as factors for division in educational transitions in Finland. They elaborate on this by explaining that in the schools, the counseling model used by counselors, overemphasizes the problem-solving approach while negating the supportive orientation approach.

They highlight two consequences of this counseling style.

One crucial consequence of the limited use of supportive orientation is that young migrant people are left alone to deal with their past and the way it links to their future plans. They themselves must raise these issues if they wish for them to be addressed in guidance encounters. This would require a lot of courage and agency. (...) Another consequence of the limited use of both supportive and inquiry orientations is that the relevant issues of young migrant peoples' social realities, past and present, are excluded from the guidance interaction. Especially, the diasporic nature of family (including family members here and there, alive or dead) and the migration history (i.e. the journey to Finland) are recurring examples of such "dreaded topics", but also racism and other forms of inequality are amongst these. (Vehviläinen & Souto, 2021a, pp.12-13)

Counselors exhibited resistance to differentiate between immigrant background students and Finnish background students during the interviews. (Souto and Vehviläinen 2021) research supports my findings. Applying their previous findings to my results, it is suitable to infer the following conclusions:

Firstly, that the reasons for the avoidance to explore the background of the student and include it in the counseling interaction, may be due to unfamiliarity with the topics that the immigrant background student could raise and also, uncertainty on how to proceed in the counseling interaction if there is deviation from the standard problem-solving approach. Lastly, that supporting the student in the immigration or refugee experience is not within their professional responsibilities or field of expertise and that another professional might be better suited for this role.

There was a second theme in this area of my research. It regarded how language influenced whether the students were "considered an immigrant" with special immigrant needs or not. Only 2 out of the 13 guidance counselors clearly said this. Yet the overall data suggests that it is a bigger phenomenon than just these two guidance counselors who feel this way. Regardless, fluency in Finnish was considered a challenge for guidance counselors with remarkably high frequencies in another section where 12 out of 13 guidance counselors listed language and communication as a challenge when counseling students from immigrant backgrounds. I discuss language and communication later when I

summarize my findings about challenges guidance counselors experience with students from immigrant backgrounds.

5.1.4 Challenges working with students: Guidance Counselors perceptions on the background of the students affecting those challenges.

12 out of 13 guidance counselors identified the primary challenge as communication and language with the student, and in some cases, with the family. Mismatched expectations between students, their families and guidance counselors about educational plans were also reported.

Jokela & Walve (2017) carried out a qualitative study aimed to identify challenges experienced by guidance counselors as it regards to counseling immigrants. Although this study is not based on guidance counselors working in upper secondary schools or vocational schools, I find the results of the study can be applied cross contextually. The 2 main challenges found in the results of this study in order of frequency were: Challenges working with counsees who were unfamiliar of the cultural conventions and social rules expectancies in Finland. Secondly, if the counselee did not speak Finnish was also reported as a challenge. The findings of this study are relevant to mine in that communicating with families and students might be challenging owing to linguistic and cultural factors affecting, among other things, the stakeholders' expectations of the educational plans. (Walve et al., 2017)

5.2 Implications

This study had two goals. To contribute to the research and development of guidance and counseling services for students from immigrant backgrounds in Finland and to find out about the working conditions and challenges guidance counselors face.

Research and development of guidance and counseling services for students from immigrant backgrounds is currently taken place based on the

guidance counselors' interviews, surveys, and sources I cited in previous chapters of this thesis. The findings related to the working conditions of the guidance counselors is that the workload is too big and there is no time to approach their job as they ideally would. This implies that without the necessary human resources the development and application of guidance and counseling services for immigrants and their diverse needs does not seem feasible.

One way of getting a solution to the problem, is to stabilize the counselor-to-student ratio to 1-200 as SOPO's guidelines recommend. However, this will probably take a long time given the financial challenges faced particularly in some small municipalities.

According to the preceding discussion and to the data, guidance counselors do not have time to reflect, research, or build new intercultural counseling competencies if they need to. They also voiced that they would like to do so.

5.3 Recommendations for farther research and practical applications suggested by the guidance counselors.

The Guidance counselors I interviewed expressed solutions and initiatives that they consider would help address their present challenges. Most suggestions made addressed strategies to better assist the immigrant student community. Some of these quotations have been modified to a small degree to provide context.

- To offer more Finnish language courses. Even if the school is a Finnish speaking school, there are students who pass the entrance examination and then do not graduate because of the lack of Finnish language skills. Guidance counselor reports that he/she has no courses to offer them. No resources to better their outcomes regarding their Finnish language skills other than the student to go and study elsewhere. (Counselor, vocational school)

- To offer more preparation courses and special teaching that does not interfere with the student joining their age group grade. The preparatory courses for immigrants to join the mainstream student curricula is only one year, sometimes this is not enough to learn a language and/or other skills to bridge the gap of the different educational systems. Additional courses would be a solution to this challenge. (Counselor)
- To have a welfare service for adult students in Upper secondary schools. This would take off some responsibilities of the guidance counselor and at the same time the student would get adequate help. (Counselor)
- Changes are good but there needs to be enough people to work with the changes. To hire more people. (Counselor)
- To organize a system where there is clear guidelines and leadership to coordinate the actors involved in the student's life. This would support a smooth and predictable communication plan between the parties involved. Another guidance counselor put it this way: To have one person responsible for the student who gathers the rest of the information from the professionals around. (Counselor)
- In adult high school context, to have a psychologist, curator, student welfare services, a nurse and mandatory course in counselling. To hire more experts to work with the students. (Counselor)
- To have agency over the regulations concerning the privacy of the student. Strict privacy rules make communication with the network difficult and unnecessarily bureaucratic. (Counselor)
- To be able to put together a group of relevant professionals to support the student for example, a social worker, a group leader and a Finnish language teacher. (Counselor)
- To give workshops for parents so they learn to use IT and programs like Wilma if needed be. (Counselor)
- To develop a better way to evaluate the educational level of the student without having to have a translator in the phone. (Counselor)

- To take into consideration cultural factors when it comes to planning the academic calendar to accommodate the cultural and religious observances of the minority groups. (Counselor)
- To promote among professionals' other forms of non-verbal communication such as drawings, showing pictures, using internet during the session. (Counselor)
- To offer intercultural communication courses for both staff members and students. (Counselor)
- To create informational resources for prospective students with clear guidelines in how the student is scored in the entrance examination. This would save the guidance counselors time to explain individually the process to the disappointed student who does not understand why he/she didn't get through the selection process. The criteria results are not so clear to understand or available for the applicant to review. (Counselor)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Webropol survey questions

1. Choose your pseudonym name for the survey
2. What is your age?
3. How long have you been working as a guidance counselor?
4. What do you like the most about interacting with students as a guidance counselor?
5. What specific qualities do you think counsellors should have?
6. What do you find the most demanding or challenging about your job in general?
7. Write a case description about a challenging situation concerning a counselling interaction with a foreign background student which ended with a positive outcome. Please include what did you do specifically to reach the positive outcome.
8. Write a case description about a challenging situation concerning a counselling interaction with a foreign background student which ended with a negative outcome. Please include what do you think you could have done different?
9. How do you incorporate cultural factors into your counseling?

Appendix 2: Letter of request to participate in research. Research Notification

01-03-2021

Dear guidance counselor,

My name is Ana Ciaran. I am studying to get a master's degree in Educational Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä. I am in the process of collecting data for my thesis.

I am writing this email to invite you to participate in my research by sharing your views with me via a webropol survey.

The purpose of the study is to gain insights into how you, as a school counselor, use your competences in different situations during your daily interaction with the students.

Your experiences with students and your opinions, are invaluable for the study. Your contribution is essential for continuous research in order to meet the needs of students.

The survey will be open until the 13th of March.

I will send the summary of the results to (name of the person who sent the invitations to participate) when the research is completed, and he can then share the results with all the counselors who received this letter.

If you decide to participate, please read the privacy notice attached to this email, and the instructions attached here as well.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

ana.a.ciaran-cano@[student.jyu.fi](mailto:ana.a.ciaran-cano@student.jyu.fi); (+358) 45 179 0666

I look forward to hearing from you! And I thank you so very much beforehand! I know time is so valuable and I am so very appreciative of you sharing it with me!

LINK FOR SURVEY: https://_____

Ana Ciaran Cano

MA student at University of Jyväskylä

Attachments

- Privacy notice.
- Instructions to read before starting survey. They are also in the survey.

Appendix 3: Information about the processing of personal data for interviews.

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
AND PSYCHOLOGY

Date 17/3/2021



A description of the processing of personal data for scientific research purposes (privacy notice; Articles 13, 14 and 30 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679)

information about the processing of personal data

1. Personal data processed in Guidance and Counseling Services in General Upper Secondary Education in Finland Study.

The scientific goal of the research is identifying or discovering themes about the interaction between counsellor and counselee.

The following background information will be collected or asked from you:

- your interview responses (Video Recorded and transcribed)
- name and email address (just for communication between you and I)
- Your age. (Necessary for linking new insights to previous studies)
- How long you have/had been working as a counselor. (Necessary for linking new insights to previous studies)

Interview responses and anonymity/data protection

The interview is semi-structured, and it is up to you what you want to say. The interview will be done via zoom and recorded. I will use a Virtual Private Network. The data will be carefully protected and nobody else will have access to it before it is transcribed and anonymized. All possible avenues for personal identification will be protected.

This privacy notice has been emailed to you after sending you the request for participation and it is not binding to anything.

Protection of personal data

-All the answers in the interview and avenues for possible identification will be anonymized right away. There will be no processing of the raw data, and it will be stored safely for a very limited amount of time.

The processing of personal data after the study

Data will be anonymized right away and original data discarded right after.

Controller(s) and researchers

The controller is the party which, alone or with another party, defines the goals and means of the processing or personal data, as well as the organisation(s) and person(s), and is responsible for the lawfulness of processing.

The controller for this study is:

- a) University of Jyväskylä, Seminaarinkatu 15, P.O. Box 35, 40014 University of Jyväskylä. Tel.: +358 (0)14 260 1211, business ID: 0245894-7. **Data protection officer of the University of Jyväskylä: tietosuoja@yu.fi, tel.: +358 (0)40 805 3297.**

Contact person(s): Ana Ciaran Cano

Phone number: +358 45 1790 666

Email address: ana.a.ciaran-cano@student.jyu.fi

The contact person for research data responds to any questions about the study.

Researchers: Ana Ciaran Cano

Rights of data subjects

Withdrawal of consent (Article 7, GDPR)

You have the right to withdraw your consent if the processing of personal data is based on consent. Withdrawing consent does not have any impact on the lawfulness of processing based on consent carried out before the withdrawal.

Right to access data (Article 15, GDPR)

You have the right to obtain information about whether your personal data is processed, and which personal data is processed. If required, you can request a copy of the personal data processed.

Right to have data rectified (Article 16, GDPR)

If there are any inaccuracies or errors in the processing of your personal data, you have the right to request your personal data to be rectified or supplemented.

Right to have data erased (Article 17, GDPR)

You have the right to request your personal data to be erased in certain situations. However, the right to have data erased does not exist if the erasure prevents the purpose of processing from being fulfilled for scientific research purposes or makes it much more difficult.

Right to the restriction of processing (Article 18, GDPR)

You have the right to restrict the processing of your personal data in certain situations, such as if you deny the accuracy of your personal data.

Right to have personal data transferred from one system to another (Article 20, GDPR)

You have the right to obtain the personal data you have given in a structured, commonly used and machine-readable format, and the right to transmit that data to another controller if possible, and if processing is automated.

Right to object (Article 21, GDPR)

You have the right to object to the processing of your personal data if processing is based on public or legitimate interest. As a result, the university cannot process your personal data unless it can prove that processing is based on a significantly important and justified reason which supersedes your rights.

Derogation from the rights of data subjects

Derogation from the aforementioned rights is possible in certain individual situations on the basis of the GDPR and the Finnish data protection act, insofar as the rights prevent scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes being fulfilled or make it much more difficult. The need for derogation must always be assessed separately in each situation.

Profiling and automated decision making

In this study, your personal data will not be used in automated decision making. In this study, the purpose of the processing of personal data is not to assess your personal characteristics, i.e. profiling. Instead, your personal data and characteristics will be assessed from the perspective of broader scientific research.

Executing the rights of data subjects

If you have any questions about the rights of data subjects, please contact the university's data protection officer. All requests related to the execution of rights must be sent to the registry office of the University of Jyväskylä. Registry office and archive, P.O. Box 35 (C), 40014 University of Jyväskylä, tel.: +358 (0)40 805 3472, email: kirjaamo@ju.fi. Visiting address: Seminaarinkatu 15, Building C (Main Building, 1st floor), Room C 140.

Any data breaches or suspicions of data breaches must be reported to the University of Jyväskylä.

<https://www.jyu.fi/en/university/privacy-notice/report-data-security-breach>

You have the right to file a complaint with the supervisory authority of your permanent place of residence or employment if you consider that the processing of personal data is in breach of the GDPR. In Finland, the supervisory authority is the Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman.

Contact for Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman: <https://tietosuoja.fi/en/home>