

Original Article

“Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon” (The Counselors of Quezon): A Localized Capacity-Building Framework Based on Guidance Counselor Identity Formation

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Abstract. The focus of this research was to develop a localized capacity-building framework based on the identity development of guidance counselors in Quezon Province, as revealed by their experiences and perceptions of their roles, using thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 22 Registered Guidance Counselors identified through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis revealed seven core themes: Theoretical Foundation, Personal Values and Beliefs, Unique Characteristics, Perceived Quezonian Guidance Counselor, Advocacies, Competencies and Skills, and Qualities and Characteristics. Together, these themes demonstrate how the professional tenets are integrated with the values of the local culture and community-oriented practice. The findings depicted “Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon” (The Counselors of Quezon) framework that structured into three categories: “Inner Core: The Being(s)”, “Behavioral Manifestation: The Doing(s)”, and “External Context & Impact: The Influence(s)”, serving as a localized phenomenon through which capacity-building programs may be developed, thereby providing efficient support and empowerment to future professionals and guidance counselors across the province.

Keywords: Cultural responsiveness; Guidance counselors; Identity formation; Local capacity-building framework.

Guidance counselors play a fundamental role in promoting mental health and supporting the holistic development of students, extending beyond academics to emotional, social, and career growth. Guidance counselors in basic education focus on ensuring students’ overall well-being by helping regulate their school and home lives (National Educators Academy of the Philippines, 2020). In higher education, guidance counselors’ role emphasizes preparing students for the workforce and graduate education (Parveen & Akhtar, 2023). With these diverse and multifaceted roles, a strong professional identity enables guidance counselors to navigate the complexities of their responsibilities with competence and confidence, acting as key support figures and change agents within their uniquely local, social, and cultural contexts (Colorado Christian University, 2025).

Identity formation for counselors is considered dynamic and influenced by personal values, theoretical

orientations, ethical awareness, self-awareness, professional skills, and socio-cultural understanding (Sarraf-Yazdi et al., 2021). Guidance counselors' personal values and adherence to ethical guidelines, such as the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association's (2021) Code of Ethics, shape their professional practice. Professional development activities, such as peer support, supervision, and conference participation, can also enhance guidance counselors' awareness of current innovations, trends, and best practices (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021). In addition, guidance counselors' self-awareness, including recognition of biases and emotional responses, is indispensable for effective practice, enabling them to adapt culturally sensitive interventions while maintaining empathetic relationships with clients (Pereira et al., 2024; Haas et al., 2024). Mastery of core counseling skills and ongoing professional training prepare counselors to meet diverse client needs efficiently (Mababa & Fabella, 2023). Moreover, understanding how personal values influence their work is crucial for ethical and contextually relevant counseling, especially in communities with deep-rooted cultural and religious traditions (World Health Organization, 2013).

Identity formation is a complex process shaped by social, cultural, and personal experiences, with various theories providing insights into its development. For counselors, professional identity development is integral to integrating personal and professional selves and is shaped by training, supervision, and experiential learning. Research shows counselors transition from needing external validation to achieving self-validation by defining their role, taking ownership of their growth, and evolving toward systemic identity (Barraclough, 2023). Counselors support this development by emphasizing knowledge, skills, attitudes, mentoring, and pedagogical approaches that foster professional identity in their field (Burns & Cruikshanks, 2018).

Despite the recognized importance of professional identity, a gap remains in understanding the unique factors influencing guidance counselors, especially in specific regions (Harrison et al., 2023). Ambiguity in role definitions, especially in the educational sector (Harrison et al., 2023), the limited power of strict implementation of RA 11036 or the Mental Health Act (2018) and a lack of national and local policies in alignment between personal and professional identity can limit counselors' potential (Dela Cruz & Atienza, 2024; Mababa & Fabella, 2023). Moreover, the identity formation of guidance counselors in Quezon Province is shaped by a complex interaction of individual values and experiences, educational influences such as graduate training, licensing, and mentoring, and sociocultural factors embedded in local traditions and family-oriented cultural values (Randall, 2023). These counselors face challenges, including limited resources, high counselor-to-student ratios, role ambiguity, evolving professional demands due to educational reforms, and complex ethical dilemmas they must weigh when addressing their clients' needs (Sanchez-Maddela & Dela Cruz-Cada, 2024). However, they also benefit from growing recognition of the importance of mental health, capacity-building programs, and technological advancements that expand service reach (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). Their counseling practices uniquely integrate local cultural elements, integrating traditional healing and family-centered approaches, positioning counselors as cultural brokers within their communities.

Many factors affect one's identity formation, including social, cultural, and personal experiences. There are many different theories about how people form their identities, and these theories contribute to our understanding of identity formation as a complex process for guidance counselors in Quezon Province. Social Identity Theory is another framework that helps to understand identity formation; according to this theory, group membership is an important contributor to identity formation, and therefore, one's identity comes from the groups to which they belong, as well as how membership in these groups shapes how they see themselves and act (Kish Bar-On & Lamm, 2023). Societal perceptions contribute to the development of a professional's identity, including that of guidance counselors. This can include how they prepare for how society will see them and how they want to be known as a competent, ethical, and reliable practitioner, so that clients can trust the services they access. On the other hand, Simplified Identity Formation Theory (SIFT) is a model that offers a straightforward approach to the complexities of identity development (Eichas et al., 2025). Situated Identity Theory holds that an individual's identity is shaped by their interactions with others. This emphasizes the necessity for guidance counselors to maintain a distinctive identity in society while still preserving their cultural roots and personal values, which make their professional identity holistic and humanistic.

Moreover, this study aimed to describe the unique practices and strategies they believed were fundamental as guidance counselors in Quezon Province in cultivating their professional identity. Also explored the lived experiences of guidance counselors in their journey of professional identity. In the end, the findings contributed to the development of "*Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon*" (The Counselors of Quezon), a localized capacity-building

framework tailored to the specific needs of guidance counselors in Quezon Province and practitioners, designed to support their professional growth, enhance their competencies, and empower them to serve their communities more effectively. This framework emphasized cultural sensitivity, collaboration, and empowerment through culturally relevant professional development, mentorship, peer networks, access to locally adapted, evidence-based resources, and advocacy, all intended to strengthen their professional identities and effectiveness in promoting student well-being. Addressing these identified challenges and leveraging existing opportunities are aimed at strengthening the counseling profession in Quezon Province, driven by a deep commitment to understanding and supporting these unsung heroes and to capacitating them to guide and empower the next generation.

Methodology

Research Design

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the practices and strategies they believe constitute their identity as professional, practicing guidance counselors in Quezon Province. Using a phenomenological approach helped the researcher delve deeper into guidance counselors' personal experiences, exploring how they make sense of their roles, responsibilities, and professional development for their practice. Moreover, this allowed the researcher to analyze the data and design a localized capacity-building framework rooted in it.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The research focused on Quezon Province. With a wide range of two cities and 39 municipalities across the province, the study will adopt a diverse, localized approach to identifying guidance counselors' responses regarding the formation of their professional identity as practitioners in their respective institutions. Moreover, purposive sampling was used to select 22 participants for this research. This non-probability method selects individuals based on specific characteristics related to the research question, thereby providing valuable insight into the cultural domain under study through those most qualified.

Table 1. *Participants' Profile*

Participant		Type of Institution	Type of Counseling Practice	Years of Practice Before Licensed	Years of Practice as Licensed
1	Private	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor - Educator	5	13
2	Private	Student Affairs and Services	Counselor - Supervisor	3	12
3	Private	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor	3	3
4	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	8	2
5	Public	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor - Educator	5	8
6	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	0	6
7	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	8	11
8	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	3	14
9	Private	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor	8	3
10	Private	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	6	2
11	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor - Supervisor	6	10
12	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	9	3
13	Public	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor - Educator	7	22
14	Public	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	3	1
15	Public	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor - Educator	8	1
16	Private	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor, Counselor - Researcher, Counselor - Educator	16	2
17	Public	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor - Educator	1	12
18	Private	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor, Counselor - Educator, Counselor - Supervisor	15	8
19	Private	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	3	1
20	Private	Nursery-GED	Counselor - Researcher, Counselor - Educator, Counselor - Supervisor	15	16
21	Private	Educational (Higher Education Institution)	Counselor - Supervisor	8	3
22	Private	Educational (Basic Education Department)	Counselor	7	1

The inclusion criteria for participants were registered guidance counselors working in any city or municipality in Quezon Province. Since guidance counselors in the Philippines are all graduates of master's programs in

counseling or similar fields, educational qualifications were common, though their educational journeys and preferences varied. The types of institutions in which guidance counselors shall be considered (educational, community, and industrial settings) are part of their professional journey in providing guidance and counseling services. In addition, the length of service is included in their profile, as the time spent in the profession provides valuable context for their experiences becoming a guidance counselor. Participants work for organizations of various types, both in the public sector and private institutions.

Research Instrument

Using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide, this research established its trustworthiness by evaluating it against Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria (Ul Haq Kakar et al., 2023). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checking and triangulation; transferability was established by providing thick, rich descriptions of the participants and an in-depth description of their experiences; dependability was ensured through an audit trail and an external auditor's review; and confirmability was obtained through both researcher reflexivity and the audit trail to ensure that findings were grounded in the data and were as free of bias as possible.

The research provided confidence in its conclusions through long-term involvement, ongoing evaluation, and member checking, which gave a comprehensive, authentic representation of the guidance counselors' voices and identity development. The authenticity of the results was also confirmed through the triangulation of multiple data sources, which strengthened the overall credibility of the identified themes from the data analysis. Rich and thorough descriptions of the participants in this study, as well as their cultural context and environment, support the applicability of the framework to comparable cultural and professional contexts. The reliability of this research was maintained through a transparent audit trail. To uphold confirmability, the audit trail demonstrates the researcher's reflection on potential bias and illustrates how themes identified through thematic analysis were generated from the data.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher scouted for potential participants across Quezon Province. Afterwards, the researcher sought endorsement by sending a letter of communication to the respective government agencies and private institutions with which participants are affiliated. Also, the researcher sought endorsement from the professional organization of guidance counselors in Quezon Province to facilitate linkage to their members for participation in the research. Once endorsements were obtained, the researcher conducted interviews with the participants. The researcher provided pre-interview guidelines, including informed consent, a data privacy notice, and the interview guide. Then, the researcher conducted interviews with the participants at their convenience.

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis was used in this research to analyze participants' responses. Thematic analysis has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in counseling research, where understanding lived experiences and identity development are central themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It aims to identify the vital components of a phenomenon or experiences that make them unique or distinct from others. This systematic yet organic and reflective approach suits the exploratory nature of the study, focusing on identity formation, where emergent themes must be carefully articulated and grounded in the data.

Furthermore, to uphold the methodological rigor and authenticity of the results, this phenomenological inquiry into the formation of identity as a guidance counselor in Quezon Province employs the trustworthiness framework proposed by Lincoln and Guba (Ul Haq Kakar et al., 2023). Credibility was ensured through extensive engagement with research participants during data collection, ongoing observation of the data collection process by researchers, participant feedback on all data and findings through member checking, and triangulation of data sources. With these measures, the researcher was able to verify the credibility of findings with confidence. To provide sufficient context for the findings on the formation of identity as a guidance counsellor in Quezon Province and for the participants involved in this study, rich, thick descriptions of the context and participants were provided to enable readers to assess whether the Local Capacity Building Framework could be applied to their contexts. A thoroughly constructed audit trail provides a comprehensive account of all aspects of the research process, from data collection through data analysis, and confirms that the findings are based on the data, facilitating verification of the study's dependability and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured respect, confidentiality, and participants' autonomy, who are professionals sharing personal and potentially sensitive aspects of their identity formation (Mirza et al., 2023). Informed consent from guidance counselors was obtained in full, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty (Hakami, 2022). Protecting confidentiality and anonymity is critical, mainly since the research may involve intimate reflections on professional and personal identity that could be linked to individual counselors if not properly safeguarded (Moriña, 2020). Furthermore, data handling complied with strict protocols for secure storage and anonymization of transcripts and recordings to prevent unauthorized access and inadvertent identification. Finally, the research sought approval from a relevant ethics review board to validate the ethical integrity of the study design and implementation, reinforcing the commitment to uphold participants' rights and dignity throughout the research process (Zhang et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

The research was conducted to better understand how to describe the unique practices and strategies considered fundamental for guidance counselors in Quezon Province. Furthermore, the results of this research are elaborated and discussed in seven themes.

Theoretical Foundation

The most frequently cited guidance counselors' theoretical foundation was the Client-Centered Approach, which emphasizes establishing trust, empathy, and a safe environment to help students realize their potential and grow as human beings. This highlights the importance of the Client-Centered Theory in building rapport and empowering clients. The guidance counselor creates a supportive environment in which clients can safely and freely explore their inner thoughts and feelings (Yao & Kabir, 2023). This exploration leads to improved self-awareness and, consequently, mental and emotional growth. In addition, the guidance counselor works to enhance the client's understanding of themselves through reflective feedback and clarifying questions (Klussman et al., 2022). Statements made by guidance counselors, such as *"I use the Person-Centered Theory to build trust and provide a safe environment for students"* and *"I follow the Person-Centered Approach of Carl Rogers. I believe in the goodness of people."*

The *Cognitive Behavioral Approach* was noted as another predominant sub-theme among the participants. CBT helps create a more balanced approach to positive thinking and improved stress management by developing a more rational outlook on life. The sources of CBT are grounded in the application of learning theories, using classical and operant conditioning to address clinical concerns (Nakao et al., 2021). These guidance counselors indicated that they typically use this therapy style to help clients identify and change negative thought patterns that affect their behavior. Some of the statements were: *"I utilize CBT to assist my clients to change negative thoughts and develop positive coping skills,"* and *"Cognitive behavioral therapy is something I use a lot because it is very helpful to my clients."*

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province also reported an emphasis on the Humanistic Approach, which supports each individual's ability to attain their full academic potential and handle the challenges they face. Guidance counselors in Quezon Province believed that individuals have the capacity to reach their full learning potential and to cope with adversity and change, supporting clients' academic development and their ability to meet challenges (Kift et al., 2012). The Humanistic Approach is also consistent with qualitative findings that emphasize recognizing and understanding how individuals experience life and develop as people. *"Using a humanistic approach, when counselling students, we support each student's capacity to grow academically and to overcome obstacles"*.

The *Existential Approach* was also reported, but less frequently, with counsellors focusing on questions of meaning and purpose to help their clients develop self-awareness and direction. *"The question for me as an Existentialist is what is the purpose of my life. By helping my clients to understand their purpose for existing, I support them in developing their own values and beliefs"*. Guidance counselors using the existential approach understand that the biological, cultural, and random nature of human experience influences how we live (Menziez & Menziez, 2024). The existential approach is grounded in the belief that most of an individual's problems stem from an inability or unreliability in using one's own judgment to make decisions and create meaning in life (Heidenreich et al., 2021). Thus, each person is responsible for creating their own meaning.

Table 2. *Themes and Subthemes of Guidance Counselors in Quezon Province*

Themes	Subthemes
1. Theoretical Foundation	1.1 Client-Centered Approach 1.2 Cognitive Behavior Approach 1.3 Humanistic Approach 1.4 Eclectic Approach 1.5 Existential Approach
2. Personal Values and Beliefs	2.1 Empathy 2.2 Respect 2.3 Integrity 2.4 Authenticity 2.5 Ethical 2.6 Humility 2.7 Growth 2.8 Spirituality 2.9 Service 2.10 Compassion
3. Unique Characteristics	3.1 Empathy 3.2 Active Listening 3.3 Empathic Dedication 3.4 Patience 3.5 Professional Development 3.6 Respectful 3.7 Relational Communication 3.8 Creativity
4. Perceived Quezonian Guidance Counselor	4.1 Accommodating 4.2 Community and Familial Values 4.3 Multiculturalism 4.4 Authenticity 4.5 Passionate 4.6 Empathy 4.7 Resilience 4.8 Service Oriented
5. Advocacies	5.1 Mental Health Awareness and Accessibility 5.2 Proactive and Selfless Service 5.3 Professional and Ethical Practice 5.4 Family Values 5.5 Community and Inclusive Wellness 5.6 Multiculturalism 5.7 Student Support and Awareness Initiatives 5.8 Approachability
6. Competencies and Skills	6.1 Communication Skills 6.2 Interpersonal Skills 6.3 Program Development and Management 6.4 Advocacy and Holistic Development 6.5 Professional Development
7. Qualities and Characteristics	7.1 Empathy and Compassion 7.2 Professional Ethical Stance 7.3 Emotional Fortitude 7.4 Interpersonal Openness 7.5 Holistic Competence 7.6 Adaptive Problem-Solving 7.7 Values-Driven 7.8 Community-Oriented Disposition

Also, many guidance counselors in Quezon Province practiced the Eclectic Approach when helping their clients. They believe there is no single theoretical foundation that can solve all problems, and that theoretical frameworks are fluid and shift as clients' needs and presenting problems change. Evidence for this was provided by the following statements from the guidance counselors, like *"I am an Eclectic Counselor, but first you have to ascertain what the client's need is before you can apply techniques specific to them,"* and *"The different theoretical foundations will vary according to the problem or situation or circumstances."* Eclectic approach takes into account the complexity of human experience. Drawing on multiple approaches, guidance counselors addressed people's presenting issues and the underlying causes of their mental health problems, promoting holistic healing and wellness (Oewel et al., 2024).

Personal Values and Beliefs

Empathy emerged as a central tenet, with guidance counselors in Quezon Province frequently emphasizing "genuine empathy combined with my strong cultural sensitivity" and the ability to "connect with students through empathy". Guidance counselors help individuals to recognize how to establish empathy with a client by creating a connection through shared experiences, including feelings (Dauchess, 2025). This connection fosters an understanding of the client as a unique individual while continuing to monitor their progress (Klussman et al., 2022). This direct access to another's experience, as posited by phenomenological approaches, resonates with the counselors' descriptions of being "very sensitive to what the client is not saying". This is further reinforced by mentions of being "very sensitive to what the client is not saying" and having "a great listener and with a high level of empathy," a deep capacity to understand and share others' feelings. This perspective suggests that the guidance counselors' reported high level of empathy is not just about cognitive understanding but also about an authentic emotional resonance with their students' experiences, which is crucial for effective counseling.

Respect is another significant value, demonstrated by guidance counselors' statements such as, "I show great respect to what the client can and cannot provide at the moment." This indicates recognition and respect for client boundaries and capabilities. When guidance counselors show respect for and incorporate clients' values into the therapeutic process, clients are more likely to experience greater satisfaction and engagement with the counselor and achieve therapeutic success. It has also been shown that clients who feel valued in the counselling process develop greater trust and commitment to it (Azwar & Maemunah, 2025). The subtheme of **Integrity** is subtly presented through an emphasis on being "authentic/genuine" and a commitment to honesty and moral principles in their interactions. Integrity is the foundation of trust, involving honesty and ethical values that affect all aspects of a guidance counselor's work and personal life with clients (Gridcheck, 2023).

Authenticity was further highlighted by phrases such as "Patience, hands-on, genuine" and the desire to be a "human counselor", a preference for real, unscripted engagement rather than a strictly "by-the-book" approach. Genuine engagement occurs when a person can connect out of the self through congruence, transparency, and integrity - beyond performative means and transaction-based relationships, like a counselor-client relationship, creating opportunities for understanding rather than manipulation and fostering connection instead of control (Singh, 2025)

Ethical Considerations, while not explicitly stated, were implicitly woven into statements about being "responsible" and having a "commitment to continuous learning and applying the latest counseling techniques," which ensure professional and competent practice. Ethical considerations in counseling provide guidance and direction to counselors as they fulfill their professional responsibilities to place their clients' welfare first (William & Mary School of Education, 2018). Trust is an integral part of the counselor/client relationship, and without adherence to the established code of ethics, this trust cannot be developed and maintained (Master Mind, 2025).

Humility was evident in reflections like, "I do not think I am unique. We all care," and "I do not think I differ from other guidance counselors. I think we share the same qualities", showing a modest view of their own contributions relative to their peers. Humility is a strength of character that enables guidance counselors to demonstrate their ethical character through modesty, empathy, deeper acknowledgement and respect of others, and full recognition of their own limitations as well as accurate assessment and ownership of those limitations (Katharina, 2020).

Growth was articulated through a "commitment to lifelong learning and innovation" and the sentiment that "my abilities simply evolved with time", indicating a dedication to continuous personal and professional development. Continuous learning encourages personal growth, self-empowerment, and the development of expertise, as well as the maintenance of current knowledge and practice in the counseling field (Ricci, 2023). Guidance counselors can position themselves to be competitive in the field and to continue to develop professionally as the industry and innovation evolve (Team Simply.Coach, 2024).

Spirituality played a role for some, as seen in "my deep sense of spiritual connection to our divine creator", suggesting that faith can be a guiding principle. Guidance counselors who discussed spirituality in counseling contexts developed a strong spiritual vocabulary, through which the complexity of spirituality and its relationship to the Divine could be understood by connecting it to their worldviews and lived experiences (Koczukur, 2025).

Service is a core motivation, captured by the statement, "*You have to have a BIG HEART for the profession and the will to serve every client*", a selfless dedication to helping others. Service orientation is central to the definition of servant leadership, an approach to leadership that places the needs of others before those of the guidance counselor and develops followers who care about others, their organization, and their community (Liden et al., 2014).

Compassion was also a recurring element, exemplified by a "*deep sense of compassion*" and the profound satisfaction derived from seeing "*the progress ng bata, especially kapag dumarating yung time na pati parents nagpapasalamat na*", a heartfelt concern for the well-being of their clients. Compassion can be viewed not only as an evolved strategy to enhance survival and reproduction but also as an innate drive to help others when motivational factors conflict with self-interested, competitive drives, providing insight into social behavior and mental states (Gilbert, 2020).

Unique Characteristics

Empathy was most evident in statements such as "Deep sense of empathy and community connection" and "A guidance counselor in Quezon is unique for their empathy and compassion, reflecting the strong family and community values in our culture". Empathic guidance counselors can convey complex contexts and meanings to their clients while increasing clients' self-awareness of their particular strengths and weaknesses in the healing process (Watson et al., 2025).

Active Listening was also an essential characteristic, as reflected in the guidance counselors' statements. Acknowledging communication and feedback helps create the environment necessary for active listening; effective communication is learned through continual practice and development (Soid et al., 2025). Statements by guidance counselors in Quezon Province that reflect active listening were observed, such as "*it is not about the techniques at all, it is about a human person who knows how to listen genuinely*".

Empathic Dedication was captured by sentiments such as "*Accommodating, sincere care for clients, do not look after excessive monetary considerations*" and "*going the extra mile to help them*". Guidance counselors can place themselves in clients' shoes by practicing active listening, showing sincere concern for those they assist, and doing everything within their power to exceed or meet expectations (Post University, 2021).

Patience was also evident in the guidance counselors who think are unique in their personal characteristics as mental health professionals. Studies show that mental health professionals who have a high level of patience are much more effective in their ability to fill their roles in producing therapeutic change successfully, and are better able to understand the mental health care needs of the clients, as they feel secure and comfortable expressing their concerns and issues (Beyene et al., 2024). Statements like "*It is just that I have been a mother for 24 years, and it helps with patience and understanding*" and "*I take time to establish a good therapeutic alliance*" show that, as a practicing counselor, having a deep sense of patience is important to establish rapport in the counseling relationship.

The **Respectful** subtheme was articulated as "accommodating, respectful, and kind," and the importance of cultural understanding is noted in the statement, "We understand our clients because we are from here. Culture is important in counseling." Counseling that takes into account cultural norms, beliefs, and values creates an environment in which clients feel understood and valued, aligns with clients' experiences, and eliminates many barriers to expressing emotions and concerns (Mulyana et al., 2024).

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province also believed that their sense of **Professional Development** is a unique characteristic of their profession. "*My commitment to continuous learning and applying the latest counseling techniques keeps my practice current and effective,*" as shown in the statements of guidance counselors in Quezon Province, shows that it is essential for them to prioritize updating their existing knowledge with the new trends and techniques in the counseling profession to help their clients better. For guidance counselors, professional development varies across the dimensions of their work that bring meaning to their work as counselors, including the ability to assume responsibility for improving systems, the profession, and delivery methods within the profession (Gallardo & Chavez, 2022).

Furthermore, the **Relational Communication** subtheme emphasized building trust and connection, illustrated by "*They are too warm in building trust with their clients*" and the ability to "*make clients feel genuinely cared for, like family*". The mental health care provided to a patient should be developed around, while allowing the client to take part in their own health care decisions; how happy they feel when they have positive communication from the

guidance counselor who is caring for them, and when they feel treated with warmth, compassion, and respect (Heyn et al., 2023).

Creativity is also a unique characteristic of guidance counselors, especially in their practice of implementing guidance and counseling services in their respective institutions. As they stated, *"Being resourceful and creative in maximizing limited resources"* is necessary for their practice to utilize available resources without compromising the quality of their services. Creative thinking has always been associated with life skills. It has evolved from guiding students in choosing an occupation to helping all individuals develop the knowledge and skills needed to take the initial step in their lifelong journey of making informed decisions (Miller, 2023).

Perceived Quezonian Guidance Counselor

Counselors make it clear that being **Accommodating** is a quality of a guidance counselor in Quezon Province; being warm and friendly when students need support is a requirement for good counseling services. In order to create an accessible and welcoming counseling setting, the physical environment must be well-thought-out as well as the way in which clients feel welcomed by the counselors with whom they will be working, creating a safe and trusting atmosphere will provide the comfort level necessary for people to share their thoughts openly without the concern of being judged or criticized (World Health Organization, 2023). One counselor stated, *"We need to be hospitable and friendly counselors so that we are accessible as school employees."* Another counselor reinforces this belief in the need to create a welcoming, approachable environment to develop effective relationships: *"A guidance counselor in Quezon Province must possess the qualities of resilience, resourcefulness, approachability, and cultural sensitivity to be able to serve all learners and communities effectively."* Both spoke to the importance of fostering an open relationship between guidance counselors and students so students can build trust in their counselor and access all school support services.

An aspect of **Community and Family Values** was the use of local cultural values in delivering therapy to individuals. One counselor said, *"Also, the strong family values, community spirit, and faith, the values-based counseling... so that it can bridge between traditional values and modern mental health practices"*. Community and family values play an important role in successful counseling by combining traditional cultural values with contemporary mental health practices (Bilač et al., 2024). By leveraging strong family connections, community support, and shared faith, guidance counselors create a bridge between a person's cultural heritage and a culturally appropriate therapeutic environment.

Multiculturalism was also a recurring sub-theme in the description of being a guidance counselor in Quezon Province, as it helps counselors develop their ability to understand cultural differences when communicating with clients. Guidance counselors and their clients come from diverse cultural backgrounds and have different ways of understanding one another. To accomplish their ultimate goal of success, both parties must develop a multiethnic environment that fosters the development of all involved, enabling clients and school counselors to recognize the impact cultural factors have had on their behavior and how those factors continue to affect the nature and quality of the relationship between them when providing guidance and counseling services (Yosef et al., 2022). For example, guidance counselors in Quezon Province believed that all Quezonians share a common cultural context and, as such, will communicate differently than individuals outside of Quezon, as noted by *"Tone of voice perhaps. If we are to give our services to non-Quezonians, they may misunderstand our natural way of speaking"*.

Authenticity, another subtheme highlighted as indicated by the following statements: *"active listening, empathy, trustworthiness, non-judgmental attitude, cultural sensitivity, self-awareness, honesty, resilience, mindful"*, created an authentic self-presentation for counselors who are actively listening and providing emotional support while developing a trusting relationship with their clients through active listening. Authenticity consists of multiple aspects, and is made up of four key pieces, being true to oneself, living consistently with one's values and taking actions consistent with those values, relating to other people in a manner that promotes the development of authenticity in them, and engaging in critical thinking and action in the course of living one's life (Yosef et al., 2022).

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province also clearly stated the importance of being **Passionate** for their work: *"But I think one should start asking themselves if they are really for the profession because the fire inside may be out if everything you do is just for something you get an advantage of. Passion, values, skills, and ethics should always go together"*. One counselor said, *"Kindness. We have different wounds, different upbringings, different perceptions. Be kind. Some or*

most are not so lucky to live a good life", underpinning the need for understanding and compassion. Guidance counselors emphasized the importance of choosing a career aligned with one's passions, kindness, values, skills, and ethics, while recognizing the diversity and challenges individuals face in their communities (Akhter et al., 2022). They strongly felt that those who want to become guidance counselors should first evaluate what drives them to pursue this career, and then determine whether it is a genuine desire to help others or simply a desire to make money (Miller, 2023).

Consistently, **Empathy** was highlighted by several guidance counselors in Quezon Province. Guidance counselors face many challenges, such as maintaining enthusiasm, interest, and dedication to students; this requires an enormous time commitment and attention to detail and demonstrates the counselor's ability to listen to each situation and to show support and understanding (Abdulraof, 2025). They stated, "Kindness. We have different wounds, different upbringings, different perceptions. Be kind. Some or most are not so lucky to live a good life." The guidance counselor's comment underscores the need for counselors to empathize with their clients and care for them.

Resilience was stated explicitly as: "A guidance counselor must be resilient, resourceful, approachable, and culturally sensitive." Guidance counselors in Quezon Province acknowledged the challenges of their profession. Resilience enables guidance counselors to deal with and adapt to unpredictable events, while resourcefulness provides the means to create new ways to solve problems when there is little or no access to standard methods (Abdulraof, 2025; Dauchess, 2025).

They displayed their commitment to being **Service-Oriented** by saying that they "always promote and provide awareness of mental health and accessibility" and that they "should be more involved in promoting and providing a program to our schools and creating programs that will help our communities," indicating their commitment to the overall well-being of our community and the development of our students beyond academics. Furthermore, service orientation has helped individuals who were once unable to seek assistance by making it easier to ask for help with a mental health problem (Abrams, 2022).

Advocacies

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province's promotion of **Mental Health Awareness and Accessibility** expressed statements such as "Always promote mental health awareness and accessibility" and "Mental Health Should be a focus," indicating that mental health awareness and accessibility are important to all counselors. Advocating for youth's well-being, they believe that "if they are mentally healthy, they will be able to navigate their lives." Guidance counselors have begun to adapt their methods to reflect a greater awareness on the part of both the general population and legislators regarding mental health issues in the Philippines through an increase in the number of mental health-related laws that have been enacted, such as the Philippine Mental Health Act (RA 11036) (Dela Cruz & Atienza, 2024).

They also exhibit **Proactive and Selfless Service**. Selflessness and proactivity were expressed as "doing more than what is expected of you" and "always being available to help," respectively, and as "being passionate about the causes we represent in the Guidance Office." Selflessness is doing more than what is required of you," which refers to the guidance counselor's duty to make the client's needs their top priority and to assist with all areas of a client's potential being developed outside of the counselor's regular duties (Sharma et al., 2023).

A strong adherence to **Professional and Ethical Practice** was also emphasized by guidance counselors, as evidenced by statements such as "I practice ethically and professionally." Professional and ethical standards of practice for guidance counselors require adherence to prescribed ethical codes of conduct protecting both client welfare and the profession's integrity while consistently placing clients' best interests first, avoiding any actions that may result in unintentional harm, and proactively working to prevent any potential for harm or exploitation (Mansaray et al., 2020).

The guidance counselors also recognized the importance of **Family Values** as a foundation for all mental health challenges, as stated by one counselor, "If families had a strong value system at the time of childhood, many mental health issues could have been avoided." Another guidance counselor advocated for family-community connections through strong family relationships. Mental health services enhance familial enjoyment by providing an individualized

treatment plan that focuses on the unique relationships, positions, and roles of family members, and by supporting professionals through multi-disciplinary collaboration (Stolper et al., 2022).

Moreover, the **Community and Inclusive Wellness** realized the desire to assist the community to “*be on top of their well-being*” and ensure “*inclusive wellness*”. In addition, one of our primary missions is to advocate for **Multiculturalism**. This includes the promotion of “*inclusivity and cultural pride*” and “*respect for diversity*”. Encouraging events and programs that celebrate the diversity of our heritage can positively impact the community (Bennett, 2024). Community engagement and cultural initiatives are excellent venues for hosting events, providing opportunities to create inclusive wellness that aligns with mental health objectives (Chutiyami et al., 2025).

There was also an emphasis on Student Support and Awareness Initiatives, including options available to clients of guidance counselors, to create “*students’ sense of responsibility, respect, and compassion for others*” and to provide “*accessible, consistent, and student-centered guidance services*”. The student's family and community resources also add to this component by offering consistent, accessible, and student-centered guidance services. School guidance and counseling programs are designed to provide students with the guidance and resources needed to address their academic, personal, emotional, and social issues and to support their academic success (Parveen & Akhtar, 2023).

Finally, all of our guidance counselors in Quezon Province place high value on Approachability, so that clients feel welcome and comfortable coming to us for support, as evidenced by the statement “*warmth and approachability in every space I serve*”. This emphasizes core values essential to effective counseling, particularly in building a strong, secure, and trusting relationship with clients (Gomez, 2024).

Competencies and Skills

The theme of **Communication Skills**, as identified by guidance counselors in Quezon Province, encompassed both verbal and non-verbal components of communication. The level of guidance counselors' skills is determined by a strong foundation in their skill set and an ability to apply that skill set with advanced awareness of its use (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014). Many respondents commented on the need for “*good communication skills, with listening skills with a good heart and non-judgmental attitude*,” and for the ability to “*actively listen*”. Also referenced were the cultural differences in how individuals communicate, as one counselor pointed out, “*Tone of voice perhaps. If we are to give our services to non-quezonians, they may misunderstand our natural way of speaking*”. Another aspect noted was that being able to communicate thoughts clearly and to know when to listen and when to speak, “*kelan tayo makikinig at kelan tayo magsasalita*”, are both very important.

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province have frequently pointed to **Interpersonal Skills** as an important quality. Interpersonal Skills include empathy, trust, and a non-judgmental aspect for counselors tasked with building strong professional relationships with their patients from the beginning by being good listeners, keeping them comfortable, and showing empathy at all times (Beyene et al., 2024). Guidance counselors mentioned the need for “*active listening, empathy, trustworthiness, non-judgmental attitude, cultural sensitivity, and self-awareness*”, and the need for “*Kindness. We have different wounds, different upbringing, different perception. Be kind*”. Counselors also expressed their desire for counselors to be “*hospitable and friendly*” and “*easier to connect with*”, emphasizing the importance of building rapport and trust within the community, which further reflects the desire to have trustworthy counselors.

Program Development and Management highlighted the responsibilities of guidance counselors in developing and managing programs that positively impact the community. Guidance counselors viewed their responsibilities as “*more active in facilitating a program in each school and establishing wide activities that will help the community*.” They indicated that they would need “*strong advocacy, program management, and collaboration skills*”. The strong relationship between student success and the integration of guidance and counseling in schools demonstrates that integrating these programs into the educational system is important for both students and educators (Abdulraof, 2025).

Advocacy and Holistic Development were other important themes for counselors, underscoring their role in raising awareness of their students' mental health needs and supporting their development in all areas. Guidance counselors champion students' needs, working with families and teachers to create comprehensive support systems that foster self-discovery, resilience, and social responsibility (Gallardo & Chavez, 2022). Guidance

counselors felt the need to encourage their students to “*Always promote mental health awareness and accessibility*” in addition to supporting students’ “*holistic growth*”. In addition to their academic improvement, counselors feel it is important to “*holistic development of students. Beyond academics, we must guide them in personal growth, emotional well-being, career planning, and social responsibility*”.

In addition, **Professional Development** emphasized the importance of ongoing learning and skill development to become a better counselor. Guidance counselors in Quezon Province support ongoing growth through “*more trainings and workshops regarding group facilitation*” and a commitment to “*continued readings and trainings*,” along with competence in “*techniques and interventions*” and “*interdisciplinary collaboration*”. Professional development for guidance counselors in the 21st century equips them with the tools and skills to be responsive to clients’ needs and prepared for evolving trends in guidance and counseling (Dela Cruz & Atienza, 2024).

Qualities and Characteristics

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province expressed a belief in **Empathy and Compassion** through statements of understanding and kindness. For example, a counselor noted that we were each raised differently and perceived life differently, and that we were all wounded in some way. “*Kindness. We have different wounds, different upbringings, different perceptions. Be kind. Some or most are not so lucky to live a good life.*” Kindness is essential for healing and personal growth based on the understanding that every human being has a unique set of “wounds” from their upbringing and their own way of looking at the world (Yosef et al., 2022).

Another guidance counselor noted how **Professional Ethical Stance** is very important to her as an individual and as a professional. One guidance counselor stated that “*Passion, values, skills, and ethics should always go together*”. Also, some of them said that being trustworthy and non-judgmental was an important part of being an ethical counselor. The integration of passion, values, skills, and ethics highlights a holistic approach in which technical competence is inseparable from moral character, thereby strengthening guidance counselors’ practice (World Health Organization, 2023).

The counselor additionally indicated that **Emotional Fortitude** implies that counselors “*are not perfect, but we can learn from our mistakes through resilience*”, and that all counselors “*need the ability to be dynamic as they continually grow and develop*”. The notion of emotional fortitude necessitates that all counselors have an evolving nature and continue to grow and develop, thereby developing themselves personally and professionally in conjunction with one another to maintain an effective level of practice (Sharma et al., 2023).

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province were anticipated to have **Interpersonal Openness**; they needed to be approachable, “*hospitable and friendly*”, as well as to have “*strong communication skills*”. A counselor explains it well: “*Dapat magaling tayo in terms of listening and expressing our thoughts clearly.*” When counselors demonstrate these attributes to their clients, they create an environment where students will feel comfortable enough to talk about their situations and get support on issues related to their personal, educational, or vocational development (Pereira et al., 2024).

Holistic Competence refers to how guidance counselors support students’ holistic development, including personal development, emotional support, and career development. Guidance counselors provide a comprehensive educational experience for all students by using proactive, community-based programs, such as emotional and career development opportunities that support emotional health and well-being (Miller, 2023). This theme emerged from the call to “*be more active in facilitating a program to each school and establish widespread activities that will help the community*”, encompassing personal growth, emotional well-being, and career planning.

Adaptive Problem-Solving was also an emerging theme, which highlights traits like being a “*critical thinker*”, “*versatile*”, “*solution-focused and receptive*”, and “*resourceful*” in navigating challenges and offering “*additional assistance*”. Adaptive solvers change their methods as circumstances change, comfortable working outside their specific area of expertise, and they use whatever tools or methodologies are available to them to achieve an objective (Mababa & Fabella, 2023).

In addition, the promotion of a **Values-Driven** approach was also highlighted, such as “*strong family values, community spirit and faith*”, integrating “*values-based counseling*”, combining traditional and contemporary methods. Integrating beliefs, customs, and the use of a localized language in counseling sessions creates an atmosphere of

mutual respect and trust, ensuring that culturally appropriate interventions are relevant to that specific community (Klussman et al., 2022).

Finally, **Community-Oriented Disposition** was also a key aspect of the counseling profession, with a commitment to be "more active in facilitating a program to each school and establish widespread activities that will help the community". Local cultural realities, stated as "cultural sensitivity and strong community ties", require that the guidance counselors must be culturally responsive and actively engaged in their community. Forming collaborative relationships with community members expands access to a larger network of supports for at-risk youth, and protecting clients' rights is addressed through an understanding of their conditions (Harrison et al., 2023; Liden et al., 2014).

"Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon" (The Counselors of Quezon): Localized Capacity-Building Framework

The "Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon" (The Counselors of Quezon) is a localized capacity-building framework that conceptualizes the guidance counselors in Quezon Province as a dynamic, interconnected process rooted in deep personal values and ethical practice, with distinct characteristics and competencies to serve the community effectively. The framework is designed with the following components:

Table 3. "Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon" (The Counselors of Quezon)

Component	Description
Inner Core: The Being	<i>the foundational self: the counselor's personal philosophy, values, beliefs, and enduring personal qualities.</i>
Behavioral Manifestation: The Doing	<i>the visible, applied skills and unique characteristics demonstrated in practice.</i>
External Context & Impact: The Influence	<i>how the counselor is perceived by the community and the areas of advocacy in which they exert influence.</i>

Moreover, "Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon" (The Counselors of Quezon) comprises themes and subthemes that explain the holistic formation of guidance counselors in Quezon Province in their practice and in the field. This also explains how they can develop an identity that supports their professional and personal growth as they continue to overcome the complexities and challenges of being a guidance counselor.

Table 4. Components of "Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon" (The Counselors of Quezon)

Framework Component	Corresponding Themes	Key Subtheme Clusters
Inner Core: The Being	1. Theoretical Foundation	Philosophical/Theoretical Stance (Client-Centered, Eclectic)
	2. Personal Values and Beliefs	Foundational Values (Empathy, Respect, Integrity, Spirituality, Service)
	7. Qualities and Characteristics	Essential Qualities (Emotional Fortitude, Values-Driven, Ethical Stance)
Behavioral Manifestation: The Doing	3. Unique Characteristics	Interpersonal Application (Active Listening, Relational Communication, Patience)
	6. Competencies and Skills	Technical Proficiency (Program Development and Management, Advocacy, Professional Development) Adaptive Practice (Creativity, Adaptive Problem-Solving)
External Context & Impact: The Influence	4. Perceived Quezonian Guidance Counselor	Contextual Attributes (Accommodating, Community/Familial Values, Resilience, Passionate)
	5. Advocacies	Outreach Focus (Mental Health Awareness, Proactive Service, Family Values, Community/Inclusive Wellness, Student Support)

The **Inner Core: The Being** section described an individual's innermost attributes. In this way, it highlights the personal beliefs, philosophy, and moral principles that underpin the professional identity of guidance counselors in Quezon Province. It provides an opportunity for guidance counselors to evaluate their own philosophical or theoretical perspective, which influences the ethical principles they use in their practice.

The **Behavioral Manifestation: The Doing** referred to the ability to demonstrate observable behaviors, skills, and characteristics in each practitioner. The second component also acted as a bridge between what is inside the practitioners, the inner core, and what is produced as a result of the practitioner doing the work. The subtheme has identified Unique Characteristics, Competencies, and Skills, as well as Interpersonal Application, Technical

Proficiency, and Adaptation. This provided the reader with examples of how an individual practitioner uses their internal identity in relation to their professional behaviors and adaptive problem-solving.

The **External Context & Impact: *The Influence*** addressed the public's perception of Guidance Counselors in their communities and how their work affects society as a whole. This way of viewing guidance counselors takes into account the social and environmental conditions that shape the role and will affect their advocacy. This used themes such as the "Perceived Quezonian Guidance Counselor" and the "Advocacy" themes to identify "Contextual Attributes" and "Outreach Focus" related to Guidance Counselors' ability to respond to community needs and their proactive efforts to promote wellness.

To support their clients, guidance counselors in Quezon Province engaged in both formal training in established counseling theories and a more "pragmatic-eclectic" approach, adapting their theoretical background to each client's individual needs while still recognizing their personal experiences. It was the need for a broad theoretical framework that would allow flexibility in addressing the various difficulties Quezonians face in personal and professional growth and employment opportunities.

While being a guidance counselor in Quezon Province has a theoretical component, much of what a counselor is or becomes is determined by their unique values and beliefs. Guidance counselors in Quezon Province base their practice on the values of Empathy, Respect, Integrity, and Authenticity, which guide their interactions with clients and help build trust. Moreover, guidance counselors in Quezon Province also exhibited culturally responsive and community-oriented characteristics that further defined them. As guidance counselors in Quezon Province, they actively listen, emotionally connect with their clients, and demonstrate a natural warmth toward them, which they have developed through their families and communities. As such, they were able to form strong therapeutic bonds. This commitment to mental health awareness, service pre-emptively, and a holistic approach towards student development shows how they fulfil their duties, utilizing the competencies needed for their positions: (1) communication; (2) interpersonal skills; (3) program management. These sets of traits provided guidance counselors in Quezon Province with a comprehensive, region-specific understanding of their role, making them valuable contributors to improving mental health in the Quezonian community.

Conclusion

Guidance counselors in Quezon Province use an eclectic theoretical framework and demonstrate flexibility by employing a variety of therapeutic approaches to meet clients' needs, including client-centered, cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, and existentialist. The counselor's own values reinforce this flexibility, including empathy, respect, integrity, and authenticity. These values, along with service, spirituality, and compassion rooted in the cultural tradition of Quezon Province, provide the foundation for their practice.

Moreover, "*Tagapamatnubay ng Quezon*" (The Counselors of Quezon) framework combines all these elements to represent the guidance counselors in Quezon Province's identity as continually evolving intertwined components of their "Inner Core" composed of values, beliefs and their "Behavioral Manifestations" that include skills, unique characteristics, along with their "External Context and Impact" or how the community views them, what they are advocates for. Thus, a deeper view of their identity as adaptable and committed to service forms a foundation of credibility and localization, on which capacity-building plans can be developed to meet the specific needs of guidance counselors and, even, future professionals who want to pursue guidance and counseling as a profession in the respective cultures.

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