



# A NARRATOLOGICAL INQUIRY ON THE JOURNEY OF REGISTERED GUIDANCE COUNSELORS: CAREER PATH DEVELOPMENT IN FOCUS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study accounts the stories of the Registered Guidance Counselors focusing on their career path development. A qualitative-narratological approach was utilized to five (5) Registered Guidance Counselors from three different schools in the Department of Education- Division of Tagum City, selected through purposive sampling. During the in-depth interview, the study utilized questionnaire that has been thoroughly checked and validated by internal and external validators. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, guided by Tiedemann and O'Hara's theory of career development, Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory. Results revealed that while RGCs draw strong personal fulfillment from serving students and addressing mental health concerns, they experience limited professional advancement, salary stagnation, and emotional strain in the workplace. Despite these constraints, participants demonstrated resilience and a persistent commitment to their advocacy of student well-being, underscoring that passion and purpose serve as key motivating factors. Their narratives indicate a need for institutional reforms – particularly in establishing structured career pathways, ensuring equitable compensation, and providing ample professional development opportunities. These findings suggest that strengthening government support, refining institutional policies, and enhancing recognition of RGCs' roles can significantly uplift the profession. Future research may further investigate how these reforms influence the long-term retention, growth, and well-being of school counselors within and beyond the region of Davao del Norte.

**KEYWORDS:** Career Path Development, Career Progression, Narratological Inquiry, Career Stagnation, Guidance Counselor Iii Qualitative Research, Registered Guidance, Counselors, Thematic Analysis, Davao Del Norte.

## INTRODUCTION

*"The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more"*

-Jonas Salk

This quote is in perfect harmony with the study that I have because the latter talks mainly about how it could have been so fulfilling to work and exert an extra mile if we are only given enough opportunity, opportunity in career advancement with corresponding enticing compensation. Career development is crucial for both personal and professional growth and in order to be competitive in the job market, it helps people stay up to date on the most recent advancements in their fields of expertise, in fact, career advancement opens up opportunities for higher-paying positions, which enhance financial stability (Lee, 2023). However, the topic on the career path development of Guidance Counselors nowadays, that is, it doesn't have enough opportunity for professional advancement, may even be a taboo because even with the obvious scarcity, not many

school administrators and even the local government give a reasonable emphasis on the phenomenon at hand.

In Vietnam, Nguyen et al. (2024) quoted Loan and Van (2015) who conducted a study highlighting that insufficient funding, limited resources, and a lack of professional development opportunities for career counselors are significant barriers to delivering effective career counseling services in Vietnamese high schools. The same is true in Laos, only 0.3% of the health budget is allocated to mental health, leading to poor services, limited career opportunities for practitioners, and inadequate treatment facilities (Wray, 2023). As a final point, guidance counselors in Pakistani universities face significant professional challenges. The lack of ongoing professional development opportunities, coupled with inadequate supervision and peer support, restricts their career growth. (Sain & Sain, 2024).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, guidance counselors have limited opportunities for career progression, providing little motivation to remain in the profession. According to Magsambol and Chi (2022), they also receive low wages,



further discouraging long-term commitment to the field (Magsambol & Chi, 2020).

In Davao del Norte, through a scheduled video call and a series of substantial questions posted to a current Registered Guidance Counselor, she expressed her stories as one of the RGCs in the province. She confirmed that indeed, the career path development of a Guidance Counselor is stagnant and therefore, unenticing, that is, it gives limited career opportunities to the Guidance Counselors which may answer the scarcity of Registered Guidance Counselors in the Philippines.

Existing studies highlight the significance of career path development. Shaito (2019) emphasizes that organizations risk losing competent personnel without career development programs, though a strong program reduces this likelihood. Similarly, Pylväs et al. (2022) describe professional growth as an ongoing learning journey that enhances career proficiency. While the former underscores the necessity of structured career programs, the latter highlights continuous learning for professional advancement. These studies support the urgent need for a defined career path for Guidance Counselors in the Philippine education and government system, as its absence contributes to a shortage of counselors, unattended student mental health, and a lack of professionals to advocate for mental health initiatives.

I was unable to find similar studies like this especially in our locality. With much confidence, this study is indeed different from the others, and I shall say that no one study can outdo every detail of this research. This study focuses mainly on listening to the experiences, challenges, struggles, and aspirations of Registered Guidance Counselors to their career path development.

This reality compelled my spirit to realize the dire need to study this phenomenon. As an aspiring Guidance Counselor, there is a necessity to dig deeper into the issue in order to unearth some answer to this stigma in the educational parlance. Hence, it is wise to conclude that paving the way to the current and would-be Registered Guidance Counselors would provide a clearer track and wider perspective to them, thus achieving the “*summum bonum*” or the *greatest good* relative to their career progression. Achieving such would mean that the current problems in the society like the scarcity of mental health professionals and correspondingly affects the less attention that is given to students and employees’ mental health will finally be attended.

### Research Questions

1. How do you describe your career path development journey as a Registered Guidance Counselor?
2. What are the challenging and rewarding experiences of Registered Guidance Counselors that shaped their professional perspectives?
3. What are the most important lessons and insights have you gained towards your career path development?

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological steps involved in gathering data relevant to research questions. It includes details about the research design, participants, researcher roles, sources of data, data collection methods, data analysis, reliability of the study, and ethical considerations.

#### Research Design

his study employed a qualitative research design with a narratological approach to examine the career path development of Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs). Qualitative research explores the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, making it suitable for understanding the challenges and opportunities in RGC career progression. The narratological approach provided a deep analysis of their lived experiences, motivations, and personal journeys, revealing insights beyond mere facts. By capturing their narratives, this study highlights the systemic challenges and aspirations within the profession, contributing to a broader understanding of guidance counseling career development.

#### Research Participants

This study involved five (5) Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) currently practicing in Davao del Norte, selected for their direct experiences with career path development. Using purposive sampling, participants were chosen based on predefined criteria to ensure in-depth, personal narratives relevant to the study. To qualify, they had to be registered professionals with at least one year of experience in either public or private schools in Davao del Norte. Exclusion criteria included unregistered counselors, those with less than one year of experience, and former RGCs no longer in active practice.

#### Data Collection Procedure

The study received ethical approval from the SMCTI Research Ethics Committee (REC) and clearance from the Graduate School Dean before execution. Permission was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent and school administrators where the Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) were employed. Participants were selected based on inclusion criteria, provided with an Informed Consent Form (ICF), and oriented in a private setting to ensure confidentiality before voluntarily signing the ICF. Privacy safeguards were implemented, including controlled access to data, secure storage, and anonymity of participants. Interviews were conducted professionally in a confidential setting, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed, with data securely stored and retained for three years per the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the research, focusing on the narratives of the Registered Guidance Counselors (RGC). Through personal reflections, the research questions are explored, revealing the various challenges, rewards, and lessons learned throughout the career of a Registered Guidance Counselor in guidance counseling. The story is told



chronologically, highlighting key moments of growth, challenges, and triumphs.

Themes	Research Question
<b>IDI-001 (Sacred Guard)</b>	
Seeing the Profession As Challenging Yet Fulfilling	RQ1
Experiencing Emotional Burden and Feeling Misunderstood	
Lack of Support and Recognition in Guidance Counseling	RQ2
Stagnation and Financial Barriers to Professional Growth	
Having Adaptability and Trusting the Process	RQ3
Hope for Recognition and Provision of Trainings for Guidance Counselors	

*"If guidance counselors are to be recognized, then the importance of our role in educational leadership must be discussed. Being in a school setting means we should be acknowledged not as disciplinarians, but as counselors. This makes upskilling extremely important. (It is encouraging that we now have guidance and counseling program specialists across fourteen specializations, with mental health being the primary concern. Incorporating mental health counseling and raising awareness about mental health and well-being is vital".*

- Sacred Guard

<b>IDI-002 (Vulcan)</b>	
Self-Discovery Through Psychology	RQ1
Feeling Blessed for a Career Transition in DepEd	
Commitment to Serve for the Children Over Recognition	
Recognition Through Hard Work	RQ2
Balancing Work with Compensation	
Providing the Family as the Driving Force	RQ3
Choosing Career with a Purpose	

*"For me, I did not work for fame or anything like that, I work solely for my purpose—the very reason why I chose this profession. But your passion and your purpose never disappear—even when you are old or retired, they will always guide you. In the first place, you must return to your 'why' in life".*

-Vulcan

Themes	Research Question
<b>IDI-003 (Wind Fairy)</b>	
Embracing Uncertainty with Passion and Purpose	RQ1
Handling Cases of Child Abuse	RQ2
Getting Inspiration from the Resilience of Counselees	
Exploring Opportunities for Additional Income	
Struggling Financially with Increasing Workload	RQ3
Finding Fulfillment in Making a Difference	
Hoping for Salary Adjustment	

*"There are times when you feel really low because of the small salary, but deep in your heart, you know that one day it will be adjusted. Personally, sir, I would be very happy if we were properly compensated for our work—it's really simple. When you pursue a master's, they should recognize that you deserve proper compensation. DepEd and the government should agree that if the qualification standard is high, then the pay should be high as well. Just consider the journey of a Registered Guidance Counselor—it should be understood. The sad part is that there aren't enough RGCs in higher positions or in the government. I've been at GC III for 14 years and I'm about to turn 15 next year, yet I remain at GC III. I have students and three children to support. What's the point of obtaining a doctoral degree if you're not properly compensated?"*

-Wind Fairy

Themes	Research Question
<b>IDI-004 (Biomedic)</b>	
The Calling: The Beginning of the Journey	RQ1
Seeking Stability and Security	
Excitement with the Proposed Career Progression	RQ2
Challenge and Fulfillment in Handling Sensitive Cases	
Waiting with Patience while Serving Locally	RQ3
Giving Priority for Resources and Recognition of Counselors	
Being Judged Despite Achievements	



*“The ratio of guidance counselors is the most important factor, sir. Having one guidance counselor for every 500 students is critical for me. In addition, having a designated counseling room, proper counseling areas, and a sufficient budget to support cases—such as assisting in rape cases or helping a suicidal child with medical referrals and specialists—is essential. I also mentioned salary as a crucial aspect; if there were more counselors, our workload would decrease, and there would be more funds available for the children, which would also justify a higher salary. I believe that the salary for a school counselor should be around 50 thousand. Although 50 thousand may seem small given today’s expenses, at least it would allow us to purchase what we need, ease out financial worries, and even afford air-conditioning at home, ensuring a comfortable life after a long, stressful day”.*

-Biomedic

Themes	Research Question
<b>IDI-005 (Samba Muse)</b>	
Pursuing Growth Through Education	RQ1
Feeling Stuck but Hopeful	
Adapting to Clients’ Needs Amid Financial Struggles	RQ2
Exploring Opportunities to Augment Income	RQ3
Finding Strength in Authentic Service	
Desiring for Just Compensation	

*“That is just one aspect of your need—the sustainability of your basic needs. Even though I pursued this path for the service, and I am happy in my work without focusing solely on salary, reality eventually catches up with you. Perhaps you will be stable in meeting your basic needs, like having a house or a car. I would advise that ‘counselors should be given their due value, and their salary should reflect that worth. After all, they are the ones who are closest to the children. A Guidance Counselor should start at 50K”.*

-Samba Muse

## DISCUSSIONS

This chapter explores the reflections and experiences of Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs), highlighting their challenges, growth, and career development. Their narratives provide insights into the interplay between personal experiences and professional advancement, revealing both difficulties and lessons that shaped their identity and purpose. The discussion is structured around the research questions, analyzing each participant’s responses in detail.

### Career Path Development Journey of a Registered Guidance Counselor

The career journeys of registered guidance counselors reveal resilience and adaptability, shaped by personal aspirations and systemic challenges. Sacred Guard found fulfillment in human connection despite the emotional demands of the profession, while Vulcan’s initial curiosity in psychology evolved into a clear mission despite financial struggles. Wind Fairy’s career took an unexpected turn, leading her to discover purpose in counseling, and Biomedic transitioned from teaching, finding joy in her students’ success. Samba Muse’s dedication to academic growth reinforced her commitment despite career stagnation, proving that fulfillment comes from perseverance, learning, and the impact made in students’ lives.

### Challenging and Rewarding Experiences of Registered Guidance Counselors that Shaped their Perspective

The journey of registered guidance counselors is marked by emotional challenges that ultimately lead to growth and fulfillment. Sacred Guard transformed her struggles into

opportunities for self-discovery, learning that every hardship reaffirmed her purpose. Vulcan found meaning in helping students heal despite the emotional toll of severe mental health cases, while Wind Fairy’s experiences with abused students reinforced the necessity of resilience in counseling. Biomedic faced the weight of trauma but found solace in seeing students regain hope, and Samba Muse, despite the emotional strain of crisis intervention, recognized that every small step toward a student’s recovery made her sacrifices worthwhile. These experiences highlight that while the profession demands resilience and adaptability, the profound impact on students’ lives provides the fulfillment that sustains their passion and commitment.

### Important Lessons and Insights of Registered Guidance Counselors on their Career Path Development Journey

The journey of registered guidance counselors is shaped by resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Sacred Guard found that hardships strengthened her ethical resolve and deepened her commitment to student welfare. Vulcan balanced emotional strain with the reward of witnessing student resilience, while Wind Fairy embraced uncertainty, learning that growth comes from navigating crises with flexibility. Biomedic’s transition from teaching to counseling revealed the power of stepping beyond comfort zones, and Samba Muse’s dedication to lifelong learning reinforced the importance of adaptability in sustaining professional identity. Their experiences highlight that overcoming challenges fosters growth, ensuring lasting fulfillment in the profession.



### Implication for Teaching Practice

Guidance counselors play a vital role in fostering students' academic, emotional, and social well-being. Their resilience, sacrifice, and passion highlight that true professional worth lies in lasting student impact rather than monetary rewards. Providing strong support systems, mentoring, and resources enables counselors to create safe spaces where students thrive. Their dedication underscores the need for schools to prioritize guidance counseling through targeted training and resource allocation. By valuing their contributions, institutions can cultivate environments where every student feels supported, reinforcing that the true measure of education is the lives it transforms.

### Recommendation for Future Research

Future research should examine comprehensive support systems for guidance counselors, including mentoring, professional development, and resource allocation. Studies should assess the impact of targeted interventions on resilience, job satisfaction, and strategies to address financial constraints. Longitudinal research on professional identity formation and intrinsic motivation could offer insights into sustaining commitment. Additionally, exploring alternative income sources may help alleviate financial pressures and promote career balance. Finally, investigations into policy and administrative support can inform equitable compensation and sustainable practices, ensuring guidance counselors receive the recognition and resources they deserve.

### Concluding Remarks

This study highlights the vital role of guidance counselors in fostering student development and a supportive school environment. It reveals their resilience, empathy, and dedication in overcoming professional and financial challenges, emphasizing that true success lies in their lasting impact on students. The findings underscore the need for strong support systems, continuous professional growth, and adaptive strategies to sustain their commitment. Reflecting on this research, I recognize the importance of advocating for better resources and training, ensuring guidance counselors thrive and continue making a meaningful difference in education.

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