

## Evaluation of Training and Preparation Programs for Guidance and Counseling Advisors (Educational and Vocational), from University-Based Preparation to Field Practice

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### Abstract:

Our educational institutions currently lack psychologists responsible for providing counselling services. Instead, these services are entrusted to guidance and counselling advisors, who are also assigned additional tasks. This raises the question of whether these advisors are qualified to deliver psychological counselling services to students, given the training they receive at university and during their professional development.

This study was conducted to examine the implications of this situation. The study was applied to a sample of advisors affiliated with the Batna Province, as well as students from the Departments of Psychology and Sociology at the University of Batna 01. The study adopted a descriptive approach. The findings revealed that the training received by guidance advisors does not adequately prepare them for counselling work.

**Keywords:** Training programmes, school guidance counsellors, practitioners.

### 1. Introduction and problem statement

School counselling helps students to achieve normal development in various personality aspects and reach their potential, enabling personal and social adjustment. Consequently, it contributes to an appropriate level of psychological well-being, which positively impacts academic performance.

In an era of change, individuals face pressures and attempt to maintain their psychological health by avoiding threats to their lives and safety. Therefore, school

counselling in the educational field is of significant importance, driven by the psychological and educational problems faced by students which are becoming increasingly acute in the face of the school administration's and teachers' inability to address or alleviate them.

Given the important role of higher education in advancing societies, universities aim to produce graduates who can fill scientific, technical, administrative and professional roles. They want their graduates to possess scientific competencies in the various roles they will undertake. Moreover, higher education offers diverse specialisations to respond to the needs of a developing society.

The need to address the problems resulting from the rapid changes occurring in Algerian society, particularly in the educational domain, has become clear. In this context, in-service training plays a key role in achieving this objective by raising the professional level of university graduates working in educational institutions, whose responsibilities are defined by laws and ministerial circulars. The training is intended to equip these graduates with the skills to support students facing difficulties stemming from various factors, primarily the substantial increase in student numbers and the diversity of school and vocational specialisations.

At the same time, we observe that university and in-service training for guidance counsellors has its strengths and weaknesses. This raises the following question: To what extent are these counsellors able to carry out their assigned tasks, particularly counselling and psychological care work, to the fullest extent?

This work includes the counselling practices performed by school counsellors within educational institutions and is considered an effective means of one of the most important forms of modern education.

In an era of rapid change in needs, and of escalating psychological, educational and social problems, school counselling plays a comprehensive educational and psychological role that significantly contributes to promoting students' healthy development in accordance with their inclinations, abilities and readiness. It also provides students with guidance on how to solve academic problems using a scientific educational approach. This enables them to continue and pursue their studies effectively and overcome various educational and learning difficulties that may hinder success.

This has been confirmed by Al-Halboosi's study (2002), which states that: "Counselling plays an important role in increasing students' ability to adapt and succeed, and in helping them to avoid problems during their studies".

However, educational institutions may lack such specialised psychological counsellors, since these services are entrusted to guidance counsellors — graduates of the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences — who carry out counselling services in addition to their other duties. This raises the question: Are these counsellors qualified to provide psychological and educational counselling services to students, given the university and in-service training they have received?

Algeria is among the countries that have recognised the importance of psychological counselling within educational institutions. It has therefore created specialised positions for counselling work in secondary education institutions, titled 'School and Vocational Guidance Counsellor', and assigned them the task of providing psychological support and school counselling to students.

Nevertheless, many counselling professionals believe that, in its current form, this task has not yet achieved its intended goal. This is due to the wide range of responsibilities assigned to these professionals and their lack of necessary working mechanisms. Furthermore, the scope of activities in which this category is involved has expanded within educational institutions. For these reasons, it is necessary to evaluate the reality of counselling work carried out by guidance counsellors, whether before entering the profession or during employment.

To understand the implications of this situation, we surveyed guidance counsellors and psychology students to examine the effectiveness of their training in preparing them for fieldwork in counselling. This was achieved by answering the following research questions:

1. Does university training meet the requirements for carrying out educational counselling duties, from the perspectives of the student and the practitioner?
2. Does in-service training match the requirements for carrying out educational counselling duties, from the perspective of the student practitioner?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of university and in-service training with regard to carrying out educational counselling duties, from the perspectives of students and practitioners?

### **3. Objectives of the study**

This study aims to examine one of the most important categories within educational institutions. The School and Vocational Guidance Counsellor, who is relied upon to help students resolve problems and support their professional integration and academic adjustment. The study also seeks to determine whether the training received by this category contributes to achieving these objectives, given that such training is considered essential for the success of the institution.

While educational institutions are interested in training and improving its management to develop their human resources appropriately, the study aims to:

- reveal the reality of the guidance counsellor's work;
- assess the extent to which the initial training of students who are expected to join this profession contributes to the performance of counselling duties.
- examine the role of in-service training for counsellors already working in the field in activating the counselling services they provide;
- identify the strengths and weaknesses in this area.

### **4. Significance of the study**

This study is related to an area of concern for all institutions: Training. Training plays an important role in organisations due to its positive outcomes; it is considered one of the most effective means of developing and renewing human resources in line

with ongoing developments. The study further highlights the most prominent advantages, disadvantages and shortcomings of university and in-service training as they relate to carrying out the educational counselling mission, whether the training has been or is currently being received in the field, from the perspectives of the student and the practitioner.

#### **4. Clarification of concepts**

##### **4.1 Definition of an Academic Guidance Counsellor**

An academic guidance counsellor is a qualified professional who provides specialised support to individuals experiencing psychological difficulties and problems. They must hold a bachelor's degree in relevant subjects such as psychology and sociology.

##### **4.2 In-service training**

In-service training is the professional development that school counsellors undergo periodically during their career. It aims to improve their knowledge, job performance and professional competence (Al-Faqih, 1994, p. 455). It is therefore an organised and planned programme that enables professional advancement and the acquisition of further information and practical experience within the profession.

##### **4.3 Initial university training**

Initial university training refers to the total preparation received by a student for educational purposes during specific academic years. This preparation includes a set of courses/subjects that the student must complete, whether theoretical or practical, in order to qualify for their future profession.

#### **First: Guidance on school orientation in Algeria**

##### **1. Definition of school guidance**

Awdh (2016) defined school guidance as 'one of the fields of psychological and educational counselling concerned with providing comprehensive guidance services to university students in all academic, professional, psychological and social aspects'. It is an essential and central pillar of the educational system as it provides an objective response to the academic, social, economic and human changes that students experience during their studies (Awdh, 2016, p. 261).

From these definitions, we can conclude that school counsellors prepare and deliver guidance programmes to students at various levels with the aim of achieving educational objectives and developing students' personalities to the greatest possible extent. They also help students to make use of school opportunities and experiences in accordance with their different capabilities and levels of readiness.

##### **2. Definition of the School and Vocational Guidance Counsellor**

The school and vocational guidance counsellor is an employee in the education sector. They oversee the implementation of the school guidance programme established by the Directorate of Evaluation, Guidance and Communication, which belongs to the Ministry of National Education. In secondary schools, the guidance counsellor is appointed as a member of the teaching team pursuant to Ministry Circular No. 219/1241/91, dated 18 December 1991.

Academic guidance is important because it helps students to identify their values and needs, understand their nature, and comprehend the purpose and message of education. It also helps students to plan an educational programme that matches their interests and abilities (Barakat and Barakhelia, 2021, p. 6).

### 3. Duties of the School Guidance Counsellor in the Algerian Educational System

The school guidance counsellor is appointed by virtue of Decision No. 219-124, dated 18 September 1991. Their duties are specified in the aforementioned decision, as well as in Decision No. 631-124-1993. These duties include:

- Identifying students and their aspirations;
- Assessing their readiness and academic results;
- Developing social and educational communication channels within and outside the educational institution.
- Contributing to shaping students' educational pathways and guiding them (Ministry of National Education, 1991, Decision No. 219-124).
- Carrying out technical and administrative activities during students' transitions between levels, and providing psychological support by administering psychological tests and scales to improve understanding of students (Ministry of National Education, 1991, Ministerial Decision No. 827).

### 3. Services of the School and Vocational Guidance Programme

#### A) School Information Services

These services involve collecting, updating and identifying documents related to school and vocational information. They involve preparing information documents and activating the guidance and information cell within the institution where the counsellor works. They also involve organising information sessions for students in the final year of middle school and the first and third years of secondary school, providing information on school and vocational pathways and promoting communication within educational institutions.

#### B) Guidance and counselling services

These involve creating a personal profile/card for each student in the first stage. This includes information about the student's family, social and economic conditions, educational pathway, and physical, health and behavioural status.

#### C) Assessment services

These include using students' academic results to understand their qualifications, classify them and present them to teachers during class meetings. They also involve studying and analysing academic results to determine their correspondence with the different streams and specialisations that students wish to pursue.

#### D) Investigation and study services

These include conducting inquiries and surveys about vocational training opportunities at district level. This is achieved by communicating with vocational training and employment qualification centres and preparing a report summarising professional specialisations, registration requirements and the required academic

level, as well as the type of training and certificate awarded, so that this information can be provided to students.

## **Second: Training Programs**

### **1. Definition**

“Al-Heyti” defines training as: “administrative and organizational efforts related to continuity, aimed at bringing about a change in an individual’s skills, knowledge, and behaviours—both in the present and the future—in order to enable them to meet the requirements of their job or to improve their practical and behavioural performance” (Ali Younes et al., 2009, p. 6)

Training includes several types, including the following:

#### **1. According to the stage of employment:**

##### **A) Induction/orientation for new employees**

New employees need information to introduce them to their new job. Training programmes for new employees aim to achieve multiple objectives, including welcoming new staff, creating an acceptable psychological orientation towards the job and preparing new employees by training them in how to perform the work. The design of induction programmes for new employees varies across institutions: some use a lecture-based approach, some rely on interviews conducted by direct supervisors and some use printed manuals containing the required information. Others combine two or more of these approaches.

##### **B) In-service/on-the-job training**

Sometimes an organisation wishes to provide training at the workplace rather than elsewhere in order to ensure high-quality training. To achieve this, direct supervisors are encouraged to provide information and training to trainees either individually or in groups. This type of training has advantages: the current complexity of machinery means workers need direct training on the machinery itself under the supervision of the relevant supervisor. However, there are also disadvantages: effective training is not guaranteed unless the supervisor is skilled and can serve as a training model, particularly when it becomes necessary to update individuals’ knowledge and skills, for example when new work methods and systems are introduced.

##### **C) Promotion and transfer training**

This type of training is based on the likelihood that the skills and knowledge required for the new position will differ from those required for the current one. Therefore, the training is designed to address this difference by providing the necessary additional skills and knowledge. The same logic applies when a company wishes to promote a production worker to a supervisory role, i.e. moving the worker from a technical to a managerial position. This difference justifies the employee’s participation in a training programme focused on acquiring administrative and supervisory knowledge and skills (Saati, 1998, p. 116).

##### **D) Training in preparation for retirement**

In advanced organisations, older workers are prepared for retirement through appropriate training.

## E) Training to update knowledge and skills

This training is provided when individuals' knowledge and skills become outdated, particularly when new work methods, technologies and systems are introduced. For instance, when modern information and computer systems are integrated into procurement and accounting tasks, individuals responsible for these functions require the knowledge and skills to perform their work using these systems.

### Third: Field study procedures

#### 1. Research method

This study evaluates training and preparation programmes for school guidance counsellors from the perspectives of students and practitioners (i.e. school guidance counsellors). An exploratory approach was adopted to gain an understanding of the reality of these two types of training. Accordingly, this study can be classified as an exploratory descriptive study. Through this approach, the strengths and weaknesses of training related to the academic and in-service preparation of school and vocational guidance counsellors were identified (Bouhoucha & Al-Dzunibat, 2007, p. 144).

#### 2. Field study and sample

The field study was conducted in May 2024 during the periodic meeting held at the school and vocational guidance centre. The study sample consisted of 56 guidance counsellors affiliated with Batna Province, as well as 60 students from the Department of Psychology and Sociology at University of Batna 01.

The students were selected using a convenience sampling method because they occupy positions as school guidance counsellors. The following table shows how the sample members are distributed according to their academic specialisation.

Table No. 1 shows the results of the sample distribution by specialisation:

Specialisations	School	Educational	Clinical	Sociology	Total
Consultants	06	18	07	25	56
Students	15	15	15	15	60

As can be seen from the table, the largest proportion of counsellors hold a bachelor's degree in various non-standardised specialisations. However, when we collected questionnaires from students, we attempted to control the sample so that the number of participants would be balanced across the specialisations recruited for school and vocational guidance counsellor positions.

#### 3. Data collection instruments

To identify the strengths and weaknesses of university and in-service training and examine how they respond to the counsellors' perception of the duties of school guidance, the following tools were used in this study:

1. A general data questionnaire containing personal information.

2. A questionnaire designed to identify the perceived advantages and disadvantages of university and in-service training as seen by students and counsellors.

## 5. Presentation of the study results

### 5.1 Presentation of the results of question one and its text.

Question 1: Does university training meet the requirements for performing the educational guidance task from the perspective of students and practitioners (school and vocational guidance counsellors)?

Table 2 shows the extent to which university training meets the requirements for performing the educational guidance task, according to students and practitioners.

	Sample	Number	percentage
Responds	Consultants	14	%25
	Students	20	%33.33
Does not respond	Consultants	42	%75
	Students	40	%66.66

Based on the data in the above table, there is an agreement between counsellors and students that university training does not meet the requirements for providing guidance in educational institutions. 75% of counsellors confirmed this. Similarly, 66.66% of students stated that they did not receive applied (practical) training that would enable them to carry out educational guidance tasks.

Despite studying under the LMD system, which is intended to prepare graduates for fieldwork, several factors contribute to this outcome: courses are largely delivered in a traditional manner; they are predominantly theoretical and do not adequately cover the practical/field component; teaching practice and internships are limited in duration; and the role and identity of those responsible for carrying out these tasks are not clearly defined.

Furthermore, the table shows that guidance counsellors are recruited from among those holding a Bachelor's degree or higher across different specialisations. This suggests that some of them may not have received adequate initial training for the profession, especially in areas such as administering tests, guidance and interviewing techniques, and providing psychological support to students with special needs or psychological problems.

### 5.2 Presentation of the Results of Question Two:

Question 2: Does in-service training match the requirements for performing the educational guidance task from the perspective of the practitioner (school and vocational guidance counsellor)?

Table No. 3 shows the extent to which in-service training matches the requirements of the educational guidance task, according to practitioners.

Consultants	Number	percentage
Responds	20	%35.71
Does not respond	36	%64.28
Total	56	%100

Based on the data in Table No. 3, we observe that 64.28% of respondents confirm that in-service training (i.e. the internship/training period after employment) does not meet the requirements for performing the educational guidance task. They indicated that the training they receive consists of nothing more than a routine meeting at the school guidance centre with the centre director and that the content of this training has no direct relationship to the guidance and counselling process itself. Instead, it takes the form of seminars on administrative matters and statistics, along with explanations of how to provide information, evaluation systems and follow-up procedures.

However, the main benefit of these meetings is the exchange of field experiences among counsellors on a personal/individual basis. At the same time, several counsellors stated that this exchange is not very useful because they all possess the same level of knowledge and skills in providing guidance to students.

Nevertheless, a significant proportion affirmed the suitability of in-service training for guidance and counselling practices: 35.71%. This suggests that the effectiveness of in-service training may vary among counsellors.

In addition, self-directed training by counsellors may play a fundamental role in developing guidance-related skills.

### 5.3 Presentation of the Results of Question Three

Question 3: What are the shortcomings of university training in performing the educational guidance task, from the perspectives of students and practitioners?

Table 4 presents the shortcomings of university training related to performing the guidance task, according to both students and practitioners.

Types of deficiencies	Consultants		Students	
	Frequency	percentage	Frequency	percentage
Quality of curricula	15	%25.42	%23,72	14
- Scheduled lessons	10	%16.94	%13,55	8
Teaching practice	11	%18.64	%22,03	13

and internships				
Teachers' competence	6	%10.16	%10,16	6
- Lack of alignment between theory and practice	17	%28.81	%30,50	18
Total	59	%100	%100	59

From Table 4, we can see that the shortcomings most frequently mentioned by guidance counsellors regarding university training are distributed across five distinct dimensions. The dimension with the highest percentage is the lack of alignment between theoretical and practical components, at 28.81% for counsellors and 30.50% for students. This can be attributed to several factors, the most important of which is the difficulty in connecting theory to field practice. Additionally, the initial training curriculum falls short of educational guidance requirements, particularly for Sociology students, and fails to consider the contextual realities of the school environment.

Counsellors also indicated that they did not receive the necessary courses/subjects throughout their academic studies to prepare them for counselling work, such as case studies, guidance interviews, psychological testing and issues related to school delays/academic underachievement. Furthermore, the curriculum was not completed in all modules during the training years due to strikes affecting either instructors or students.

The second most frequently reported dimension relates to the quality of curricula and pedagogical approaches, at 25.42% for counsellors and 23.72% for students. Regarding practical components and internships, some students do not have access to them or they do not exist at all. In other cases, they are limited to a few field research activities within specific courses. Furthermore, these internships are described as 'formal' or 'only symbolic', due to the absence of effective supervision and the provision of superficial, insufficiently specialised information.

Shortcomings related to the competence of instructors received a relatively low percentage. Students believe that there is a shortage of specialist instructors with limited experience and pedagogical training. Some instructors struggle with the methods of delivering information to students, especially within the LMD system, while others are part-time or contract staff without higher degrees, which makes it harder for them to deliver lessons effectively. Additionally, there is a lack of coordination between lectures and practical sessions.

## 5.4 Presentation of the Results of Question Four

Question Four: What are the shortcomings of in-service training regarding the performance of the educational guidance task from the practitioner's perspective? The following table illustrates this.

Table 5 shows the shortcomings of in-service training related to performing the educational guidance task, according to the practitioner.

Internship-related deficiencies	Consultants	
	Frequency	percentage
Quality of internships	17	%32.69
- Lack of resources and shortages	12	%23.07
- Preoccupation with administrative matters instead of follow-up and guidance	14	%26.92
- Other	9	%17.30
Total	52	%100

Based on our observations of the previous table, we find that the shortcomings of in-service training for counsellors can be summarised as follows:

- Focusing on administrative matters at the expense of monitoring and guidance (26.92%);
- The type of internships (32.69%);
- The lack of resources and/or insufficient resources (23.07%).

These issues can be seen as a combined total.

This can be attributed to the school guidance and counselling centre's emphasis on information, guidance and evaluation, which are also the guidance counsellor's responsibilities. However, counsellors' work has been limited to these tasks only. These tasks could instead be handled by computers, which would not take much time. Information could be provided on the requirements of each field of study that students may choose, alongside studying each student's academic pathway and other related information. These tasks could be carried out by the guidance counsellor using ready-made software programmes.

## 5.5 Presenting the results of Question Five and its statement:

What are the benefits of university training with regard to carrying out the educational guidance task, from the viewpoint of students and practitioners? The following table shows this.

Table No. 6 shows the benefits of university training in relation to carrying out the educational guidance task from the perspective of students and practitioners.

Positive items	Consultants		students	
	Frequency	percentage	Frequency	percentage
Quality of curricula	%28.88	13	14	31.11%
Using educational technology	%13.33	6	8	17.77%
Teaching practice and internships	%20	9	6	13.33%
Teachers' competence	%26.66	12	11	24.44%
Other	%11.11	5	6	13.33%
Total	%100	45	45	100%

We can see from Table 6 that the most frequently cited advantages of university training for counsellors in the classic system were related to the quality of the courses and teaching methods, at a rate of 28.88%. According to the counsellors, these courses included measures that, to a certain extent, helped with understanding students' problems, including: child and adolescent psychology, assessment/testing techniques, test construction, methodology and psychological measurement.

The same percentage was recorded for new LMD system students, where the advantage related to the quality of the courses was 31.11%. This indicates progress and change in the type and nature of the courses and measures. Advantages of university training related to teachers' competence were estimated at 26.66% among counsellors. This percentage dropped slightly among students, where it was estimated at 24.44%.

Additionally, the study participants identified further advantages associated with self-training, such as interacting with experienced professionals, engaging with the surrounding environment, and utilising new communication technologies.

### **5.6 Presenting the results of Question Six and its statement:**

What are the advantages of in-service training with regard to carrying out the educational guidance task from the viewpoint of practitioners? The following table shows this.

Table 7 shows the advantages of in-service training in relation to carrying out the educational guidance task from the viewpoint of practitioners.

Positive	Consultants	
	Frequency	percentage
Using educational technology	12	%32,43
Exchanging diverse experiences	15	%40,54
Internships and study days	10	%27,02
Total	37	%100

Based on our observations of Table 7, we found that the advantages of in-service training were very similar for all members of the study sample. The highest percentage was ‘exchange of diverse experiences’, at 40.54%. During meetings, counsellors share knowledge, particularly those with greater seniority who, through field experience, learn how to deal with the types of problems they may encounter in educational situations. We also note that the use of educational technologies ranked second at 32.43%, since they help counsellors perform their duties, particularly in the areas of guidance and evaluation. Finally, internships and study days came in at 27.02%, which may be because they are somewhat routine.

### 5.7 Presenting the results of Question Seven and its statement:

To what extent is there a balance between theoretical and practical training for carrying out the guidance task, from the viewpoint of practitioners? The following table shows this:

Table 8 shows the extent to which there is a balance between theoretical and practical training for carrying out the guidance task from the viewpoint of practitioners.

	Frequency	percentage
Balance between theory and practice.	24	%42,85

There is a balance between theoretical and practical training.	32	%57,14
- There is no balance between theoretical and practical training.	56	100%

Based on the results of Table 8, we find that guidance counsellors who have started work and experienced the realities of their workplace confirm that there is no balance between what they learnt and what they are required to do. This figure stands at 57.14%, suggesting the need to reconsider recruitment methods and required specialisations, as well as updating/renewing training.

### General discussion

In this study, we examined the reality of training for school guidance counsellors, assessing it from the viewpoints of practitioners and students who had experience of guidance and counselling practice in Algerian schools. The study revealed significant discrepancies, particularly with regard to the quality of the curricula and content they studied. These curricula were insufficient to prepare them for carrying out guidance tasks, except in relation to certain general principles. The study also highlighted the low number of field internships and their lack of effectiveness.

Furthermore, counsellors pointed to a lack of consistency between their initial university training and field practices. Students confirmed this, stating that the curricula and content did not change substantially, but rather remained mostly in the form of minor adjustments to labels. Students also indicated that teachers' competence is limited and that some instructors still use traditional teaching methods, failing to employ modern technological tools that could support training. The study also showed that in-service training does not meet the educational guidance requirements for counsellors. This is largely due to the administrative direction taken by the centre's head, who has placed an emphasis on guidance, evaluation and information/media sessions at the expense of counselling services, such as listening to students and providing psychological support for their problems. There is also a lack of supportive resources for counsellors, particularly given the large-scale recruitment of counsellors to middle schools. To date, many middle school principals have not understood the tasks of guidance counsellors, and no dedicated offices have been assigned to them. Instead, their work is treated as administrative, so they are placed in the secretary's office. We observed this during our repeated visits to some of our colleagues. Indeed, some counsellors have stated that school principals minimise the counsellor's role by treating it as administrative work and requiring counsellors to handle tasks in the secretary's office or in the digitalisation unit.

This all indicates a lack of clarity and awareness of the counsellor's role within the school institution. One weakness of this in-service training is that it is delivered

largely theoretically during periodic meetings organised by the head of the centre with counsellors from the same department. However, in-service training does have some advantages, as counsellors have mentioned, such as the exchange of diverse experiences and the opportunity to benefit from conferences and training days by raising concerns and discussing solutions in cooperation with the head of the centre. Based on the results we obtained, we call on those responsible for university training (i.e. the academic side) and those responsible for guidance and counselling at guidance centres or school principals to prioritise the following:

**1) In the field of initial training for students:**

Reconsider the course content taught to students so that it aligns with the specific tasks defined in profession-related decisions, especially with regard to psychological follow-up and school guidance. This should also include the appointment of specialist teachers in each field.

Field training should provide students with the opportunity to interact with experienced professionals and gain an understanding of the real workplace before taking up the job. It must include how to administer psychological tests and study cases. Efforts should be made to complete the course content to avoid gaps. Where possible, training should move away from purely theoretical teaching and focus on conducting interviews with students, especially individual and group interviews, and address how to deal with different problems and ways to solve them.

**2) In the field of in-service training:**

The university should coordinate with guidance centres to provide training for guidance counsellors during their service by sending trained instructors from the university's 'Service to Society' programme.

Activate study days and seminars, focusing primarily on the issues counsellors face in their work.

- Ensure these events include experts and specialists in educational guidance to provide counsellors with the necessary tools for guidance and psychological follow-up.

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