

Qualifications and Competencies of Guidance Designates, and Extent of Implementation of School-Based Guidance Services: Insights for Capacity-Building Initiatives

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Abstract

This study examined the professional qualifications and competencies of guidance designates and the extent of implementation of school-based guidance services in public secondary schools in the second congressional district of Northern Samar. Anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, Systems Theory, Competency-Based Theory, and Human Capital Theory, the study used a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were gathered from guidance designates assigned in 31 public secondary schools through a researcher-developed survey questionnaire validated by three Registered Guidance Counselors. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage distribution, weighted mean, and multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that most respondents held Bachelor's Degrees, had served as guidance designates for seven years or more, and had attended limited guidance-related trainings. They were highly competent in interpersonal communication and crisis management but only moderately competent in program development, implementation, and assessment. Guidance services were generally highly implemented, particularly career guidance, prevention and intervention, orientation and information, individual inventory, follow up, and assessment and referral, while homeroom guidance was moderately implemented. Professional qualifications did not significantly predict the extent of guidance service implementation, but competencies significantly influenced implementation, with program development, implementation, and assessment emerging as the strongest predictor. The study concluded that formal qualifications provide a foundation, but competencies more directly determine effective service delivery. It recommends specialized capacity-building, mentorship, workload support, standardized tools, and stronger monitoring systems. The study supports SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 16, and SDG 17 by strengthening school-based mental health support, quality education, career readiness, safer institutions, and stakeholder collaboration. Its sustainability impact lies in improving institutional capacity, educational support systems, public health response, and community-based learner welfare services.

Keywords: Career Guidance, Guidance Designates, Guidance Services, Homeroom Guidance, Program Development, School-Based Guidance, Student Support

1. Introduction

This study examines the professional qualifications and competencies of guidance designates and the extent to which school-based guidance services are implemented in public secondary schools in the second congressional district of Northern Samar. It responds to the growing need for strengthened student support systems amid increasing learner concerns related to mental health, academic stress, cyberbullying, family dynamics, career uncertainty, behavioral risks, and psychosocial well-being. Anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, Systems Theory, Competency-Based Theory, and Human Capital Theory, the study assumes that educational background, training, and length of service contribute to the development of competencies, and that these competencies influence the effective delivery of guidance services. The study also provides a basis for capacity-building initiatives intended to strengthen guidance service delivery in schools.

Education has become a holistic process that extends beyond knowledge transmission and academic skill development. In a rapidly changing environment shaped by technology, social shifts, and global challenges, guidance services have become essential in helping learners cope with cyberbullying, information overload, screen addiction, academic pressure, identity concerns, family issues, and uncertainty about the future. Guidance personnel serve as a support system by providing emotional assistance, mental health interventions, and preventive services before learner concerns become more serious. Globally, the role of guidance counselors has shifted from disciplinary or administrative functions to strategic participation in student development. International standards emphasize that effective guidance requires appropriate academic preparation, certification, communication skills, problem-solving ability, cultural sensitivity, and knowledge of psychological principles (ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors. American School Counselor Association.). In schools, however, implementation varies because of limited personnel, inadequate training, competing administrative

responsibilities, and insufficient resources. These constraints make the competencies and preparedness of guidance personnel critical to the quality and responsiveness of school-based support systems. In the Philippines, guidance services are anchored in Republic Act 11036, or the Philippine Mental Health Act of 2018; Republic Act 12080 or the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act; and Republic Act No. 9258, also known as The Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004. DepEd policies, including DO No. 40 series of 2012, DM-OUCI-2021-359, DM-OUCI-2021-346, and DM-OUCI-2021-347, provide standards for child protection, counseling and referral, career guidance, and homeroom guidance. These policies identify key services such as individual inventory, homeroom guidance, career guidance, orientation and information, prevention and intervention, assessment and referral, and follow up. Although guidance services are mandated to be delivered by registered guidance counselors, many Philippine schools lack licensed counselors and therefore assign teachers or other school personnel as guidance designates. While the global standard is 1:250, the Philippines has adopted a 1:500 ratio, yet public schools often exceed this benchmark (Lacson, J. et al. (2024)). In Eastern Visayas, only ten (10) out of 4,254 public schools employ licensed guidance counselors, leaving most schools dependent on guidance designates, advocates, and coordinators (Chi, C. (13 August 2024)). This condition is also evident in Northern Samar, where guidance designates often function as the primary providers of guidance services.

Related literature shows that educational background, training, and length of service support effective guidance service delivery. Professional standards and laws emphasize the need for qualified and continuously trained guidance personnel, while studies show that many guidance designates have education-related degrees but limited specialization in guidance and counseling (ASCA School Counselors Professional Standards and Competencies, 2025; Republic Act 9258; Republic Act No. 12080; Maestrado and Bocar, 2024; Pagatpatan and Alejo, 2025). Continuous professional development strengthens competencies, but experience must be supported by further training because learner needs continue to change (Republic Act No. 10912; Medalla and Musni, 2025; Alovera and Ybanez, 2020; Barro, 2025; Niles et al, 2025; Antwi, 2023). Competency-related studies identify interpersonal communication, crisis management, and program development as essential to guidance work. Communication builds trust and supports learner disclosure, while crisis management enables guidance personnel to respond to bullying, violence, addiction, suicide risk, and other school concerns (McPherson and Lampert, 2024; Handi and Teguh, 2025; Alovera and Ybanez, 2020; Charlton et al, 2021; Maniss et al, 2021). Guidance designates also need skills in program development, implementation, and assessment because they serve not only as support providers but also as program managers (DepEd's Specialized Training for Guidance Designates; Medalla and Musni, 2025). The literature further shows that implementation varies across guidance service areas. Individual inventory is considered foundational because it allows schools to understand each learner academically, personally, and socially (Teachers Institute). Gipalen and Madrigal (2020), Aguilar-Ramat (2022), and Cabrera (2020) found that inventory services are often implemented, although Dulay and Pitonang (2023) noted that limited knowledge and institutional support can hinder implementation. Homeroom guidance supports academic, personal-social, and career development through DM-OUCI-2021-346. Iglesia (2025) Volante and Olua (2022), Pagatpatan and Alejo (2025), and Viray (2022) emphasized that implementation depends on knowledge, training, funding, teaching load, scheduling, and time management. Career guidance helps learners make informed educational and occupational decisions. Republic Act 11026 institutionalized career guidance and counseling for secondary students. Sahito and Sahito (2025) found that career guidance improves confidence, academic performance, and career awareness. David and Mohebi (2026) also stressed its role in informed career choice, although Maestrado and Bucar (2024) reported that career guidance activities did not directly relate to students' choices. Orientation and information services support adjustment and decision-making. Alovera and Ybanez (2020) identified orientation, anti-drug awareness, anti-bullying campaigns, school policy lectures, and information dissemination as common activities, while Alvarez (2025) noted the use of bulletin boards, display racks, display windows, newsletters, posters, and leaflets. Prevention and intervention address bullying, absenteeism, violence, addiction, harassment, and suicide risks. Wiley and Cory (2013) emphasized that prevention, early warning intervention, and crisis response must be institutionalized in policy and practice, while Sokol et al (2021) found that some interventions are delivered after crises without evaluation. Assessment and referral are guided by DM-OUCI-2021-359, RA 11036, RA 10533, and Regional Memorandum No. 134 series of 2025, but Arellano et al (2025) found challenges in linking with mental health professionals and in gaining client and family cooperation. Follow up ensures that interventions are monitored and that students continue progressing. Cabrera (2020) found that follow up is often among the least implemented services, and Mudrika and Suherman (2024) identified lack of evaluation, supervision, reporting, and school support as obstacles.

At the global level, guidance counseling is increasingly understood as a developmental, preventive, and responsive service rather than a merely disciplinary function. International standards highlight professional preparation, ethics, communication, cultural sensitivity, and psychological knowledge as key requirements for effective school counseling. At the national level, Philippine law and DepEd policy provide a strong mandate for school guidance and mental health services. Republic Act 11036 institutionalizes mental health as a national concern, Republic Act 12080 requires basic education institutions to implement mental health and well-being programs, and Republic Act No. 9258 professionalizes guidance and counseling practice. DepEd memoranda further operationalize homeroom guidance, career guidance, counseling and referral systems, and child protection mechanisms. At the local level, the shortage of licensed guidance counselors creates a major implementation challenge. In Eastern Visayas, the very limited number of licensed guidance

counselors in public schools makes guidance designates central to service delivery (Chi, C. (13 August 2024)). In the second congressional district of Northern Samar, guidance designates often carry primary responsibility for guidance functions. The study therefore focuses on public secondary schools in the municipalities of Catubig, Gamay, Laoang, Lapinig, Las Navas, Mapanas, Palapag, Pambujan, San Roque, and Silvino Lobos.

This study is anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, Systems Theory, Competency-Based Theory, and Human Capital Theory. Social Cognitive Theory explains how personal factors, behavior, and environment interact, with self-efficacy influencing task performance (Open Oregon Educational Resources. (n.d.) Social Cognitive Theory.). Systems Theory views guidance services as part of an interconnected school system, where effectiveness depends on personnel competencies, institutional structures, resources, policies, and support mechanisms (Encyclopedia of Archaeology, 2024). Competency-Based Theory emphasizes that effective performance is shaped by knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other characteristics (Raven, J. (2001)), while Human Capital Theory highlights the role of education, training, and experience in improving productivity and performance (Science Direct. (n.d.) Human capital theory.). In this study, professional qualifications such as educational background, guidance-related trainings, and length of service are expected to influence the competencies of guidance designates in interpersonal communication, crisis management, and program development. These competencies are then expected to affect the implementation of school-based guidance services, including individual inventory, homeroom guidance, career guidance, orientation and information, prevention and intervention, assessment and referral, and follow up.

Although previous studies have examined guidance service implementation, counselor competencies, and program effectiveness, there remains a need to examine the combined influence of professional qualifications and competencies on the implementation of specific guidance services. Dulay and Pitonang (2023) reported that lack of professional competence and training affects the implementation of guidance services. Ruth et al (2026) found that professional competence, training, and experience enhance service delivery. Barro (2025) revealed that implementation is associated with professional education, training, and length of service. However, many studies focus only on competencies or program implementation, with limited attention to how qualifications, competencies, and implementation interact. There is also insufficient localized research on guidance designates in Northern Samar using a unified framework that includes individual inventory, homeroom guidance, career guidance, orientation and information, prevention and intervention, assessment and referral, and follow up. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationships among qualifications, competencies, and service implementation and by using the findings as the basis for capacity-building initiatives. The study specifically aims to determine the respondents' professional qualifications in terms of educational background, guidance-related trainings, and length of service; assess their competencies in interpersonal communication, crisis management, and program development, implementation, and assessment; determine the extent of implementation of guidance services; examine the relationships among qualifications, competencies, and implementation; and propose recommendations for capacity-building and improved guidance service delivery.

This study naturally aligns with SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being because it focuses on school-based mental health support, crisis management, prevention and intervention, assessment and referral, and follow up. Its emphasis on learner concerns such as bullying, harassment, internet addiction, drug addiction, suicide risk, and psychosocial well-being supports public health sustainability and mental health promotion in basic education. It also aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education because guidance services support learners' academic, personal-social, and career development. Homeroom guidance, individual inventory, orientation and information, and career guidance contribute to educational sustainability by helping schools provide holistic learner support rather than focusing only on academic instruction. The study relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth through its focus on career guidance, career decision-making, and preparation for higher education or work. By strengthening guidance designates' competencies, schools can better assist learners in making informed educational and occupational choices. The study also supports SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions because school guidance services include child protection, prevention and intervention for bullying, harassment, violence, and crisis concerns, as reflected in DO No. 40 series of 2012 and other DepEd policies. Strengthening referral systems, crisis response, and institutional support contributes to safer and more responsive school environments. Finally, the study aligns with SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals because its significance extends to schools, principals and school heads, DepEd, DSWD, guidance designates, students, local government units, community partners, and future researchers. Its findings may support collaboration among educational, social welfare, local government, and community stakeholders in improving student support systems.

The study contributes to public health, educational, socio-economic, institutional, community, and governance sustainability by strengthening school-based guidance services. Improved competencies in crisis management, assessment, referral, prevention, intervention, follow up, and career guidance can help schools address learner concerns, support holistic development, and guide students in making informed educational and occupational decisions. The findings also provide evidence for DepEd, school heads, and partner agencies in planning capacity-building initiatives, improving resource allocation, strengthening policy implementation, and building safer, healthier, and more responsive school communities.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to present the respondents' professional qualifications, competency levels, and extent of guidance service implementation. The correlational component was used to examine the relationships among respondents' qualifications, competencies, and the implementation of school-based guidance services. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to describe the current status of the variables and analyze their relationships as basis for proposed capacity-building initiatives.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in 31 public secondary schools located within or near the poblacion areas of the municipalities in the Second Congressional District of Northern Samar, Eastern Visayas, Philippines. The district covers Catubig, Gamay, Laoang, Lapinig, Las Navas, Mapanag, Palapag, Pambujan, San Roque, and Silvino Lobos.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were guidance designates assigned in public secondary schools located in the town proper across the municipalities of the second congressional district of Northern Samar during school year 2025–2026. They were selected because they performed guidance-related functions in their respective schools and were directly involved in the implementation of school-based guidance services.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used total population sampling because the number of guidance designates in the district was manageable and represented a specialized group within the school system. All individuals assigned as guidance designates in the covered schools were invited to participate in the study.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made structured survey questionnaire validated by three Registered Guidance Counselors. It gathered data on respondents' professional qualifications, competencies, and extent of guidance service implementation. The qualification section covered educational attainment, length of service, and guidance-related trainings using Aguilar-Ramats's (2022) classification. The competency and implementation sections were based on DepEd standards and used a four-point Likert scale to measure communication and interpersonal skills, crisis management, program development, and the implementation of major school-based guidance services.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering began with the preparation of the validated research instrument. The respondents were identified through networking with fellow teachers and were approached personally through house-to-house visits because schools were on summer vacation during the data gathering period. The respondents were informed of the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Printed questionnaires were distributed, and respondents were given sufficient time to complete them. The accomplished forms were collected and checked for completeness. After data collection, the researcher organized, encoded, and prepared the quantitative responses for statistical analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency and percentage distribution were used to describe the respondents' professional qualifications. Weighted means were computed to determine competency levels and the extent of implementation of school-based guidance services. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine significant relationships between qualifications and extent of implementation, between competencies and extent of implementation, and between qualifications and competencies. All statistical tests were interpreted at the 0.05 level of significance.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the data gathering process. The respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained. The researcher safeguarded participant anonymity, protected data privacy, and preserved the integrity of the information gathered.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Professional Qualifications of Guidance Designates

3.1.1 Educational Background, Length of Service, and Training

The respondents were mostly holders of Bachelor's Degrees, comprising 54.29 percent of the total, while 40.00 percent had completed Master's Degrees. Only one respondent had a doctorate degree, one had units in Guidance and Counseling, and none had a Master's Degree with specialization in Guidance and Counseling. In terms of length of service, 62.86 percent had served as guidance designates for seven years or more, while only one respondent had less than one year of service. For guidance-related training, the largest group had attended one to two trainings, while smaller groups had attended three to four or five or more trainings. Overall, most respondents were categorized as Emerging Guidance Designates because their educational background and number of trainings were below the criteria for the Established Guidance Designate category, despite their long years of service. These findings reflect the condition described by Maestrado and Bocar (2024), who noted that most guidance designates in Philippine basic education have general education degrees rather than specialized preparation in guidance and counseling. Although RA 9258 and RA 12080 set high standards for guidance practice, the findings show that these standards are not fully met in actual school settings because of the shortage of licensed guidance counselors and the assignment of teachers based on availability rather than specialization. The number of respondents pursuing or completing graduate education supports Pagatpatan and Alejo's (2025) observation that efforts to improve teacher qualifications are progressing, but specialization in guidance and counseling remains limited. Consistent with Human Capital Theory, Baro (2025) and Niles et al (2025), long service may help guidance designates develop practical competence; however, RA 10912, Medalla and Musni (2025), Alovera and Ybanez (2020), and Antwi (2023) emphasize that experience must be complemented by continuous professional development and relevant training.

3.2 Competencies of Guidance Designates

3.2.1 Interpersonal Communication Skills

The respondents were rated Highly Competent in interpersonal communication skills, with a grand mean of 3.63. The highest-rated indicator was active listening and showing understanding of students' concerns, while establishing rapport and trust and demonstrating empathy received the lowest means, though these were still interpreted as Highly Competent. The findings indicate that respondents generally possess strong communication and relationship-building skills needed in guidance work. This result may be attributed to the respondents' experience as teachers, where regular interaction with students, parents, and other stakeholders is part of their professional role. The finding supports Competency-Based Theory and is consistent with Handi and Teguh (2025) and the Australian Institute of Professional Counselors, who emphasized interpersonal communication as essential to effective guidance service delivery. It also corroborates Garcia (2026), who found that guidance designates are strong in personal competence, particularly empathy and supportive relationships. The high score in active listening supports Alovera and Ybanez's (2020) claim that guidance designates are effective because of their ability to listen to learners. It also agrees with McPherson and Lampert (2024), who found that teacher-designated guidance personnel demonstrate dedication, interpersonal skills, and initiative in supporting learners' academic, personal, and career development.

3.2.2 Crisis Management

The respondents were rated Highly Competent in crisis management, with a grand mean of 3.31. The highest-rated indicator was maintaining confidentiality in handling sensitive cases, while identifying students experiencing crisis or distress obtained the lowest mean. The results show that respondents recognize ethical responsibilities in handling sensitive cases but are less confident in identifying and managing crisis situations. This finding suggests that crisis intervention remains a specialized area requiring deeper training in mental health, risk assessment, trauma-informed practices, and emergency response. The result aligns with Charlton et al (2021) and the Department of Education (2023), which recognized that guidance designates understand ethical principles such as confidentiality, informed consent, and professional boundaries, but may be constrained in practical mental health support. Iglesia (2025) similarly found that guidance designates are strongest in confidentiality and referral of complex cases. However, the moderate ratings in identifying at-risk students and applying interventions support Maniss et al. (2021) and Garcia (2026), who emphasized the need for specialized preparation in handling student crises. The practice of referring complex cases is also consistent with the DepEd Child Protection Policy.

3.2.3 Program Development, Implementation, and Assessment

The respondents were rated Moderately Competent in program development, implementation, and assessment, with a grand mean of 3.08. The highest-rated indicator was implementing planned guidance activities, while the lowest was developing or assisting in crafting mental health and guidance programs. The results show that respondents are more confident in carrying out existing activities than in designing, monitoring, evaluating, and improving guidance programs. This finding indicates that program management requires technical knowledge beyond routine implementation. Medalla and Musni (2025) noted that guidance designates handle multiple responsibilities, which may limit their participation in

comprehensive program planning and assessment. The DepEd Training Framework also recognizes that program development involves needs assessment, planning, and evaluation, which are not always included in the pre-service preparation of general education teachers. The finding is further supported by Ignacio, et al's (2022) observation that guidance designates have a moderate extent of competencies in organizing, administering, and supervising guidance programs. Thus, although respondents can implement existing activities, they need further training in developing comprehensive and needs-based guidance programs.

3.3 Extent of Implementation of School-Based Guidance Services

3.3.1 Individual Inventory

Individual inventory was rated Highly Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.34. The highest-rated indicator was observing confidentiality of student information, while regular review of inventory records received the lowest mean. The findings show that schools maintain student records and protect sensitive information, but the regular review and systematic use of these records may not be consistently practiced. This result suggests that schools have basic inventory mechanisms, but data utilization for intervention planning needs strengthening. The finding supports Gipalen and Madrigal (2020) and Aguilar-Ramat (2022), who identified record keeping as one of the most implemented guidance services because of its administrative necessity. The Teachers Institute also describes individual inventory as the foundation of guidance work. However, the lower rating on reviewing records reflects the concern raised by Dulay and Pitonang (2023), who noted that records may be collected but not regularly updated or used because of heavy workloads and limited training in data utilization.

3.3.2 Homeroom Guidance

Homeroom guidance was rated Moderately Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.14. The use of prepared modules or learning materials received the highest rating, while evaluation of homeroom guidance sessions received the lowest. The findings indicate that schools generally use DepEd-provided materials and comply with the basic structure of homeroom guidance, but evaluation remains weak. This result suggests that homeroom guidance is being implemented but not yet fully strengthened as a developmental program. The high rating for the module use reflects adherence to DM-CI-2020-00115, which provides policies, modules, monitoring tools, and learner development assessment tools. However, the moderate overall implementation and low evaluation rating align with Pagatpatan and Alejo (2025), who identified workload and administrative responsibilities as barriers. Iglesia (2025) and Volante and Olua (2022) also emphasized that limited professional training affects implementation, while Viray (2022) noted that scheduling and time management difficulties contribute to teachers' inadequacy in implementing homeroom guidance. The weak evaluation component suggests that the program may sometimes be treated as a routine activity rather than a sustained developmental intervention.

3.3.3 Career Guidance

Career guidance was rated Highly Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.54, making it one of the most implemented guidance services. The highest-rated indicators were conducting career orientation programs, helping students identify interests and abilities, and providing information about career opportunities and pathways. The findings show that schools give strong attention to helping learners prepare for future educational and occupational decisions. This finding reflects the influence of Republic Act No. 11206, which institutionalizes career guidance and counseling programs in secondary schools. The high implementation rating also suggests that career guidance is easier to deliver because of standardized national programs and DepEd learning materials. The result supports Sahito and Sahito (2025), who found that career guidance helps students make informed educational and occupational choices. It also agrees with David and Mohebi (2026), who emphasized the importance of policy frameworks, career assessment tools, and learning activities in helping learners choose suitable pathways. However, Maestrado and Bucar (2024) noted that while career guidance programs are widely conducted, their direct relationship with students' final track or strand choices is not always clearly established.

3.3.4 Orientation and Information Services

Orientation and information services were rated Highly Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.40. Informing students about school rules, policies, and services received the highest rating, while making guidance-related information materials available received the lowest. The results show that schools are effective in directly communicating important information to students, but they may have limitations in producing and maintaining guidance information materials.

This finding supports Alvarez (2025), who noted that information dissemination is among the most commonly implemented guidance services in schools. However, the lower rating on the availability of materials indicates that some schools may face resource constraints that limit the variety, accessibility, and consistency of guidance-related information. Thus, while direct communication is practiced, the sustainability of information dissemination may require better materials and communication resources.

3.3.5 Prevention and Intervention for Common School Concerns

Prevention and intervention services for common school concerns were rated Highly Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.53. The highest-rated indicator was the documentation and management of cases involving common school concerns. The findings show that schools actively address bullying, teenage pregnancy, delinquency, discipline issues, and other behavioral or psychosocial concerns through prevention and intervention activities. This result reflects increasing awareness of student welfare and mental health concerns under existing DepEd policies, including the Child Protection Policy, and mental health legislation such as RA 11036 or the Philippine Mental Health Act. However, the strong rating for documentation and case management suggests that implementation may lean toward responding after incidents occur. This observation is consistent with Sokol et al (2021), who found that school-based interventions may often be reactive rather than fully preventive.

3.3.6 Assessment and Referral

Assessment and referral services were rated Highly Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.25. Referring students to appropriate professionals or agencies received the highest rating, while the use of risk assessment tools or methods received the lowest. The findings indicate that guidance designates generally conduct referral but have weaker implementation in technical assessment procedures. This finding confirms Suayan-Bondad (2026), who asserted that foundational guidance services such as referral are widely implemented because schools prioritize practical and manageable functions that support daily instruction. However, the lower rating for assessment tools reflects the challenges identified by Arellano et al. (2025) and Dulay and Pitonang (2023), who reported difficulties in identifying students at risk and accessing specialized mental health services due to limited background knowledge and training. The result suggests that while guidance designates recognize when referral is needed, they often lack formal preparation and standardized assessment tools, showing a gap between policy expectations and school-level resources.

3.3.7 Follow Up Services

Follow up services were rated Highly Implemented, with a grand mean of 3.31. Maintaining communication with parents and guardians received the highest rating, while conducting follow up sessions after interventions received the lowest. The findings show that guidance designates generally monitor students after interventions and maintain home-school communication, but systematic follow up sessions may not always be regularly conducted. This result indicates that respondents recognize the importance of continuity in student support. As emphasized by the Teacher Institute, follow up is not limited to monitoring students but also includes sustaining partnerships with parents. The finding aligns with DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, which emphasizes home-school collaboration in addressing student concerns. However, the lower rating for follow up sessions supports Cabrera (2020), Gipalen and Madrigal (2020), and Mudrikah and Suherman (2024), who identified follow up as one of the more challenging guidance services because guidance designates often have heavy workloads and teaching responsibilities.

3.4 Relationships Among Qualifications, Competencies, and Service Implementation

3.4.1 Professional Qualifications and Extent of Implementation

The regression analysis showed that professional qualifications did not significantly predict the extent of implementation of guidance services. Educational background, length of service, and trainings attended explained 21.4 percent of the variance in implementation, but the overall model was not statistically significant. Length of service had the strongest influence among the predictors, followed by educational background and trainings attended, but none reached the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that professional qualifications do not significantly influence the extent of implementation of guidance services was accepted. This finding suggests that higher education, longer experience, and more trainings may be associated with better implementation, but these factors alone are insufficient to explain differences in service delivery. The result agrees with Ignacio et al (2025), who found no significant correlation between guidance teachers' qualifications and performance. However, it contradicts Aguilar-Ramat's (2022) conclusion that years of service directly correlate with the extent of implementation of guidance services. While Baro (2025) and Niles et al (2025) argue that experience and qualifications matter, the findings suggest that credentials may influence implementation indirectly through competencies and organizational support. This supports Antwi's (2023) view that education and experience must be supported by school resources, administrative support, and manageable workload.

3.4.2 Competencies and Extent of Implementation

The regression analysis showed that competencies significantly influenced the extent of implementation of guidance services. Interpersonal communication skills, crisis management, and program development, implementation, and assessment explained 66.8 percent of the variance in implementation. Among these predictors, program development, implementation, and assessment was the only significant predictor, while interpersonal communication skills and crisis management were not statistically significant when considered together with the other competency variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that competencies do not significantly influence the extent of implementation of guidance services was rejected. This finding supports Competency-Based Theory, which holds that effective performance depends on the competencies required for specific professional functions. It also supports Systems Theory because planning,

implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation are necessary for effective organizational performance. The result is consistent with Medalla and Musni (2025), who emphasized that qualifications serve as entry requirements, while competencies drive actual performance. Although communication and crisis management remain important, the findings show that the ability to plan, implement, monitor, evaluate, and document guidance programs is the strongest determinant of implementation. This validates the need for capacity building focused on program management and service delivery.

3.4.3 Professional Qualifications and Competencies

The regression analysis showed that professional qualifications significantly influenced the competencies of guidance designates as a combined model. Educational background, length of service, and trainings attended explained 31.4 percent of the variance in competencies. However, none of the individual predictors reached the 0.05 level of significance. Educational background had the strongest standardized coefficient, followed by length of service and trainings attended. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that professional qualifications do not significantly influence the competencies of guidance designates was rejected. This finding suggests that competencies are shaped by the combined influence of education, training, and experience rather than by a single qualification factor. The result supports Human Capital Theory, which states that education, training, and experience contribute to the development of knowledge, skills, and professional capability. It is also consistent with Alovera and Ybanez (2020), who emphasized that formal education and training provide the foundation for practical skills. The result reinforces Medalla and Musni (2025), who viewed professional development as a key strategy for improving the capabilities of guidance personnel. Thus, strengthening only one qualification area may be insufficient; a holistic approach involving academic advancement, relevant training, and experiential learning is needed to improve guidance designates' competencies.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that guidance designates generally possess foundational academic degrees and long years of service, but they have limited specialized training in guidance services. They demonstrated strong interpersonal communication and crisis management competencies, but only moderate competence in program development, implementation, and assessment. School-based guidance services were generally highly implemented, particularly career guidance, prevention and intervention, orientation and information, individual inventory, follow up, and assessment and referral, while homeroom guidance was only moderately implemented. Professional qualifications did not significantly predict the extent of implementation of guidance services, but competencies significantly influenced implementation, with program development, implementation, and assessment emerging as the strongest predictor. Professional qualifications, when considered collectively, were significantly related to competencies, indicating that education, training, and experience work together in developing the capability of guidance designates.

It is recommended that DepEd, school divisions, principals, and school heads strengthen guidance service delivery through mandatory certification, specialized capacity-building, and a holistic qualification system for guidance designates. Training should focus on legal and ethical foundations, crisis management, mental health awareness, assessment, referral, follow up, homeroom guidance, career guidance, and especially strategic guidance program development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. School heads should reduce non-guidance workloads, provide dedicated time and resources, establish mentorship with registered guidance counselors, strengthen homeroom guidance monitoring, and support standardized tools and documentation systems. Future researchers should examine systemic factors such as budget, workload, facilities, student-to-counselor ratios, and administrative support, and may use mixed-methods, step-wise regression, or factor analysis to determine how qualifications and institutional variables affect competencies and service implementation.

The study was limited to public secondary schools within the poblacion areas of the municipalities in the second congressional district of Northern Samar and included only teachers assigned to guidance-related functions. Licensed guidance counselors, private schools, and higher education institutions were not covered. The study relied on self-reported data, which may be affected by personal bias and varying interpretations, and although it examined the extent of implementation of guidance services, it did not measure the long-term effectiveness or outcomes of these services among students.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards, with approval and permission secured from the concerned authorities before data gathering. Participation of the guidance designates was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained after they were briefed on the purpose of the study, confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from participation. All gathered data were treated with privacy and used solely for research purposes. The author declares no conflict of interest and assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work.

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