

Perspective of Principals on Different Aspects of Counselling Services in Delhi Schools

Dr. Mohd Muzahir Ali^{1*} Ms. Shadma Yasmeen²

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Education, AFU, Faridabad, Haryana

² Research Scholar, Department of Education, TMU, Moradabad, UP

Abstract – Over the last few decades in India, counselling has emerged as a professional field throughout the 29 states and has generated a lot of attention from various stakeholders, particularly from the principals who have devoted time to explore its utility for school going children. The principal facilitates interaction between various groups within the school and extends the scope of these ancillary services to even cover the parents and a number of agencies outside the school system. It was therefore, felt important to know as to what was their opinion about the counselling programme of their schools. Descriptive survey method was used as a research design for the study. The target population of the study was the principals overlooking different government and private schools of Delhi. Sample of 56 principals were randomly selected out of a total of seven districts of the capital of India. This research paper highlights their perspective on various aspects associated with counselling programmes in Delhi.

Keywords: Counselling Services, Child's Potentialities, Career Guidance, Assessments.

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INTRODUCTION

The study focused on identifying the various aspects of counselling services as understood by principals of schools situated in seven districts of Delhi. This paper examines the perspective of the principals who are placed at the top of the school organization. How do they perceive these services? What is their understanding about the role of counsellors? How useful do they find these services? These are some of the questions, which are dealt with in this paper. Their perception and understanding of the roles of counsellors is determinant of the support they receive from them. Principal's positive outlook is likely to enable the counsellors to consolidate their work and adapt these services to the changing needs of the students. The roles of the principals in giving a push to these services in their schools have been highlighted again and again by educationists and researchers alike. They are the functionary who, if convinced, can ask the managers and the policy makers of the schools to take every stride and enact a proper counselling programme in their school. Since they are at the apex position in their schools, they act not only as a source of authority, but also as facilitators for effective counselling services in their schools (Jayaswal, S.R. 1998).

PROFILE OF THE PRINCIPALS

The study included 56 schools in seven districts of Delhi (India) which had employed counsellors on a full-time basis. The Principal, placed at apex of the organization, acts not only as a source of authority, but also as a facilitator, facilitating interaction between various groups within the school and extending the scope of this function to even cover the parents and a number of agencies outside the school system. It was important to know as to what was their opinion about the counselling programme of their schools. A profile of the principals has been drawn in Table A.

Table A: Profile of the Principals

S. No.	Age Group	Sex		Educational Qualification	
		Male	Female	Post Graduate	Doctorate
1	Below 45 years	12	14	26	Nil
2	45-50 years	8	10	14	4
3	More than 50 years	6	6	8	4
	Total	26	30	48	8

A look at the profile shows that sex-wise there is a near-balance in the numbers of respondents. As against 30 female principals, 26 male principals were part of the study. While it is mandatory for the principals to have a degree in Education, eight out of 56 principals have gone beyond this minimum eligibility criterion to do their doctorate also. It was also seen that majority of the principals are in the "Below 45 years age group", closely followed by more senior ones in the age group of 45-50 years. Only 12 principals were of 'More than 50 years of Age'. Four out of eight principals who were doctorates belonged to the age-group 45-50 years. Thus the sample had a balance of experienced principals as well as younger ones.

AWARENESS ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNSELLORS

The principals develop educational goals for the institutions they work in. Being administrators of school, it is up to them to make counsellors partners in education or let them act as 'guest professionals'. The counsellors cannot take it for granted that since they are professionals, their services would be appreciated by other school staff including the principals. The perception of principals about the work they do, determines to a large extent the value accorded to the work of counsellors in the schools (Beauchemin, P. & Kelly, M.S. 2009).

A prerequisite to ascertain the perception of principals about counselling services was to see how aware they are about the activities of the counsellors. Since all principals were not directly responsible for the recruitment of the counsellors, this was an important factor to be considered. Their level of awareness is reflected in Table B.

Table B: Awareness of Principals about the Activities Undertaken by the Counsellors

S. No.	Respondents' Awareness	Total N = 56
1	Very aware	44
2	Quite aware	12
3	Not at all aware	Nil

Q. *What specific activities does the counsellor perform in your school?*

To reiterate, being the executive heads of the institutions, it is logical to expect that they would have knowledge about the details of the activities

undertaken by the counsellors working in their schools. Not only would they be aware but would direct the counsellors who would help in translation of their vision through school programmes (Kakkad, P. 1996). As expected, it was seen that majority of the principals were very well aware of the activities taken up by the counsellors. Besides being simply aware, they consulted the counsellors from time to time to develop these services further. Of course, the level of involvement of principals varied from school to school.

On the other hand, 12 out of 56 principals included in the study were not very aware of all the activities taken up by the counsellors employed in their schools. The principals may not be motivated enough to have counsellors as staff members in their school. Therefore it is no surprise that principals of these schools are not fully aware of the activities of the counsellors. The counsellors appear to have been imposed on the existing system in these schools. In one private school, the principal was not aware about the activities taken up by the counsellor because he had joined that particular school only a few months back. By and large, the principals of the private schools were quite well versed with the activities of the counsellors. It is because these schools have found it necessary to employ the counsellors. As per the new guidelines of the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), it is now mandatory for the schools to employ these functionaries.

ROLE OF COUNSELLORS: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION

The dictionary meaning of role is 'the position of a person in a particular situation and the degree to which they are involved in it'. Being part of a setting, which has the primary goal of imparting education, the acceptance of counsellors into the system is not easy. The need to define the role of the counsellors in a school setting is only too obvious. The design of counselling services would depend to a large extent on the understanding of their roles, especially by the principals (Gibson, R.L. & Mitchell, M. H. 2005). The principals were asked to define the role of the counsellors employed in their schools. The responses of the principals was tabulated and shows that in their perception, a counsellor performs a variety of functions ranging from a general activity to a more specific counselling generic tasks. Full range of activities performed by the counsellor, as perceived by the principals, is given in Table C.

Table C: Role of Counsellors: Perception of Principals (*Multiple Responses were received*)

S. No.	Role of the Counsellor	N = 56
1	Academic Problems of Students	56
2	Career Guidance	52
3	Community Service	2
4	Link between school-home	28
5	Promote Positive Mental Health	12
6	Sensitize Teachers	4
7	Special Education	2
8	Health Problems	2

Most principals regarded the role of counsellors as important because they recognize that students in the contemporary society face many challenges. They feel that parents are unable to fulfill their roles due to lack of time or lack of understanding of the problems of their wards. By and large, most principals consider the role of counsellors as one which is carried out within the school. There is no written guideline describing the role of counsellors in private schools. The guidance and counselling course which gives the framework for these services, outlines their role as one in which the counsellors should offer psycho-social assessment, provide career guidance and related work and develop guidance programmes for students by organizing class talks on relevant topics. This description of roles is quite similar to the one outlined for counsellors by EVGB (Educational & Vocational Guidance Bureau). Since the schools do not necessarily have to follow these specific roles, they have a more flexible approach in defining the roles of counsellors. These have been expanded to include some other important areas also as revealed in the responses of the principals.

Principals of private schools recognize the primary role of counsellors to be that of providing career guidance to students and handling their problems (**Compton, G. 2000**). All the principals interviewed mentioned that counsellor's role primarily consisted of offering counselling to students to help them overcome their problems. Career guidance is given almost equal importance (52 out of 56 principals). Principals recognized this and related work like giving interest inventories, aptitude assessment as an important role of counsellor. While active counselling was given due importance, they were not expected to take up preventive work. Only 12 principals believed that counsellors can help in promoting positive mental health among students. The counsellor's role in organizing sensitization programmes for teachers was recognized by only four principal out of 56 principals.

The principals recognize their role as links between home and school also although it is not specified as a job responsibility. Despite this recognition (28 out of 56 principals), home-visits are rarely made by the counsellors. This is because they are expected to limit their interactions with parents to the parent-teacher forum and organizing special interventions for them within the school. It does not include home-visits. Interesting only two principals felt that counsellor has a role to play in reaching out to the wider community. They are not expected to organize any community service/social awareness activities in schools. It is probably for this reason that counsellors in private schools do not organize community service programme and have also stayed away from the various projects organized in the schools.

Thus, on the whole it is observed that counsellors are expected to take up more career guidance and related work of the schools. In these schools, principals expect them to organize activities at the preventive level also, but this role has not emerged very strongly as should have been the ideal case.

TREND OF COUNSELLORS EMPLOYMENT: PRINCIPALS' VIEWS

In the past two decades, the trend among the schools is to employ personnel to look after various demands of the modern society (**Hendricks, G.E. & Barkley, W. M. 2011**). The researcher tried to ascertain the reasons for the employment of the counsellors from the principal's point of view. When they were asked very specifically as to why they had employed the counsellor in their schools, further clarity could be obtained. Certain needs of schools were identified which has an influence in the employment of these counsellors.

Principals gave specific reasons for employing the counsellors. The most common reasons mentioned for employing them in order of priority were - to handle the increasing problems of children, provide career guidance and take up welfare services related to the students. The principals felt that the problems among the students were on the increase primarily due to the influence of media and 'Social Networking Sites' and the increasing trend among both parents to seek employment outside home. The schools had recruited the counsellors so as to help the students cope with the difficulties that interfere with their studies. The focus of counselling in these schools was clearly on a therapeutic role rather than a preventive one. Only 12 out of all the 56 principals mentioned personality development as a reason for having the counsellor in their school.

With regard to counselling, although the principals mentioned that problems in our society are increasing and they need specialized people to handle these, further probing showed that they

preferred counsellors to provide career guidance more than personal counselling. Between the two, the former seems to be gaining more importance than the latter. This was also experienced by an NGO which is promoting school counselling services. A functionary of a NGO shared that whenever they wanted to organize a workshop for the students to deal with their problems, both small and large scale; it is very difficult for them to convince the schools because they feel that they can handle this on their own. On the other hand when they say that they want to have a workshop for career guidance, it is readily agreed because these are appreciated more by the parents, teachers as well as the students. Why is it so? Is it because career guidance is more tangible? Does it give more market return? But what about the mental health of the child? Counsellors carry out aptitude tests and organize career guidance seminars which give more visibility to their work (Slash, M. & Marvel, F. 2017). It can be shown by principals as an important service being provided by their school to enhance the image of the school thus increasing their status among the lot.

It is interesting to note that only four principals out of 56 felt that community service should be a concern of everyone and beside the counsellor any teacher can also initiate and organize programmes in this area. Thus it is quite clear that the emphasis among schools has shifted from social awareness and community service to counselling, especially career counselling. Having established that, what kind of personnel do they look for to fulfill these requirements of the school? The principals feel that it is the counsellors who can fulfill these needs of the schools. They are said to be suitably qualified to take up this important role. The schools expect more specialized services nowadays. This also explains the trend among schools to employ counsellors on a wider spectrum.

REACTION OF PARENTS TOWARDS COUNSELLING SERVICES: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION

If the counselling services are viewed in the preventive-promotive light, they would find better acceptance. Focusing only on problems gives a negative image to these services and individuals would hesitate to meet the counsellors even if they are available in the school (Ishak, P., Zaidi, R. & Low, Q. 2012). The view-points of parents are equally important. If they perceive these services as stigmatized, they would not only themselves be reluctant to meet the counsellors, but would also not allow their children to meet them. Even if the parents do meet the counselling functionaries, on the insistence of the teachers, they would be involuntary and hesitant partners in the counselling process. Principals interact with the parents very often and therefore have an idea about how parents react to

the counselling services (Mckay, C. Sanders, M. & Wroblewski, S. 2011).

Majority of the principals opined that parents accepted these services well. According to the principals, parents were very forthcoming in accepting these services and co-operated with the counsellors. Some principals opined that the parents were gradually opening up and developing a positive attitude towards counselling, which was not so earlier. The positive aspects recognized by the parents included - availability of the functionaries in school, flexibility of hours in meeting them, individualized services offered to their children and skills of the counsellors which they found helpful and quite useful. Very few principals did not think that parents readily accept counselling services. They considered these services as stigmatized. The reasons for this are lack of awareness about the work of the counsellors, their protectiveness towards their children which makes them believe that their child cannot have 'problems' and their own biases. These biases could be many - meeting the counsellor would mean that their child has a psychiatric problem, it would affect them socially, they know the best about their ward so how can a third person tell them what to do and how to behave with their child. One principal, while agreeing that parents in her school accepted these services, gave negative reasons for this. She mentioned that parents are opening up towards these services because it means taking responsibility out of their hands and dumping it on the school. Thus most principals opine that counselling services find acceptance among majority of the parents. Those reluctant in accepting these services were opposed to the idea of singling out their child. The principals were hopeful that this attitude would change with the consistent efforts of the counsellor and the school administration.

MONITORING OF COUNSELLING PROGRAMME IN THE SCHOOL

Accountability of work is of vital importance to make any service more efficient and suitable to the needs of the organization. Lack of such accountability gives the impression that the services offered are unresponsive to the problems (Devi, V. 2004). It is important for the counsellors as service providers, principals as administrative heads of the schools, teachers as team-mates and parents as partners to review the counselling work from time to time. This monitoring of counselling services increases accountability on the part of the counsellors and thereby helps in their survival and development. It is irrelevant whether or not the administration requires some form of accountability from the counsellors individually or as team members. It is their professional responsibility to account for and report the outcomes of their practice. It is important that

other stakeholders especially the principals are actively involved in the counselling sessions (**Zandit, M. 2015**). There are many ways and means by which principals involve themselves. It is done through scrutiny of records, personal interactions, feedback from students and parents and their own observations (**Lucy, H. 2010**). It was on this understanding that the principals were asked as to how they monitored the work of the counsellors.

Most principals in private school relied on records and indirect ways of monitoring. These include their own observation and feedback from others. Daily diaries were kept and maintained by most counsellors and these were submitted to the principals from time to time or when it was demanded by the principal. These diaries contain the work plan and some details of work undertaken by the functionary on a daily basis. In 34 out of 56 schools, these diaries were submitted to the principals. This helped them to keep in touch with the general work undertaken by the counsellors within the school. Since these diaries do not give details of counselling work, the principals also relied on feedback given to them by others including teachers, parents and even students. A combination of these helped the principals to monitor the counselling services in their schools.

Thus it was seen that no formal system of monitoring exist in the schools. Monitoring is mostly done through one-to-one interactions and feedback from other staff members, parents and students. The functionaries submit records to the principals but they do not expect the counsellors to give them details about the counselling cases. Yet, they are able to gather enough information through their interactions with teachers, parents and students. Since the principals did not expect them to submit any particular records specific to counselling, they do not demand for it from the counsellors and are satisfied with whatever these counsellors submit. None of the principals complained that they do not receive proper records from the counselling functionaries. This is also probably one of the reasons why counsellors were complacent about maintaining records.

COUNSELLING FUNCTIONARIES AND TEACHERS: PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVE

Teachers and counsellors are both employees of the school. While both have the common goal of making students gain from the education imparted in school, their roles are different. Teachers play a more direct role of imparting education whereas counsellors work towards creating a more enabling environment for students to overcome their problems (**Ranadey, C.R. 2007**). Moreover, while teachers are by and large more concerned about the general performance of all students, counsellors focus on individual aptitudes and abilities. These diverse roles may be supplementary and harmonious or result in making

each suspicious of the other. It is, indeed, a daunting task for the principals to keep a balance between the teachers and the counsellors (**Mishra, T.R. 2002**).

Often, the principals have to play a facilitating role when the recommendations of the teachers and the counsellors are at cross path. This is likely to happen more often at the time of assessments of students. Being the chief functionaries in schools, principals are expected to take a decision in favour of one, which may antagonize the other (**Singer, J.B. & Slovak, K. 2011**). The principals were asked if such a situation arises, how they would deal with it. About three- fourth of the principals mentioned that the roles of each are defined and there has never been an occasion when there has been a major difference of opinion. Usually there is mutual agreement between the two and both have a positive attitude. However in one- fourth of the cases the principals mediates if required and takes an objective view, which is acceptable to both the parties.

According to the principals, areas of conflict between the counsellors and teachers are mutually resolved. However, the teachers may not think so. If the decision is not taken in their favour, it may appear to them that the principal has not been fair to them since assessment of students is their area of expertise. This information was cross-checked by asking the teachers if the principals favoured the counsellors. Although a large number of teachers did not think so, a significant numbers felt that the counsellors was favoured sometimes. A few teachers believed that the principals favoured them often. This shows that about one-third teachers believe that principals favour the counsellors.

What could be the reasons for this? Among others, one reason could be lack of confidence in the recommendations made by the counsellors. As has already been discussed, the counsellors were not very good at making their work visible. Furthermore, they do not have the responsibility of a class teacher, which relieves them of a lot of paper work. Unlike the teachers they do not have teaching responsibilities, correction-work, making report cards and similar work that are undertaken in school setup. It may give the impression that the counsellors have very few responsibilities and may not accord much value to their work. In such circumstances, it may become difficult for the teachers to accept the recommendation of the counsellor, if it is contrary to their own believes. If the principal also supports the decision of the counsellor, it may further antagonize them and they may think that the principal favours them. To counter this situation, it is very important for the counselling functionaries to involve the teachers at every stage and work in consultation with them so that they feel involved. If the case is discussed directly with the principal, it may not be very acceptable to the teachers. Having meetings for

case discussions would help building better team work.

USEFULNESS OF COUNSELLING SERVICES: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION

While monitoring the counselling programme, the principals also form a certain opinion about these services either through feedback given by others or from their own observation (Teasley, M. 2008). Their opinion about the general quality of counselling services in their school was ascertained. They were asked to give their opinion about the usefulness of counselling services keeping the problems of students and interventions provided by the functionaries in mind. The responses of the principals are analyzed as under with the help of Table D.

Table D: Usefulness of Counselling Services as Perceived by the Principals

S. No.	Perception of Principals	N=56	Percentage
1	Very useful	26	46.42%
2	Useful	22	39.28%
3	Somewhat useful	6	10.71%
4	Not at all useful	2	3.57%

Q. In your opinion, how useful is the counselling services in your school in helping students with their problems?

Principals are the chief executives of the schools and somewhat responsible for their recruitment, one would expect them to perceive counselling services as very useful ones for the students (<http://www.principalhealth.com>). This is what was observed also where most principals found the services very useful. Four principals mentioned that the quality of counselling services provided in their school were excellent. The remaining thought they were good. Perhaps their expectations from the counsellors were more.

In our opinion, the perception of the principals depended to a large extent on the image projected by the counsellors and also visibility of their work. If they know what the counsellors do, they appreciate and value their work. Some suggestions for improvement mentioned by the principals provide a useful insight. These are given under the following three points:

1. Their training in counselling should be improved. They have to be more thorough in their preparation to become counsellors and keep themselves up to date with the research and development in psychology not only in India but also abroad. Human behaviour is constantly changing both

individually and collectively. Therefore it is the counsellor who has to be trained adequately.

2. The presence of a counsellor on the school staff is important but it should not be looked as only their area of expertise. Parents and teachers are also equally responsible for bringing up the children. Counsellors should help them in handling the problems of students adequately.
3. We should try to catch the children doing right rather than always catch them doing wrong. Counsellors should not only be involved in dealing with problems but also in bringing about an attitudinal change in the teachers as well as the parents.

An overview of the responses given by the principals regarding various aspects of counselling services brought out significant findings. The research paper attempted to highlight various aspects of counselling programmes and their utility for students support as perceived by the principals of selected schools. It is hoped that this writing will add to the existing knowledge in the field of counselling and help relevant personnel and policy makers to frame future course of action.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. Mohd Muzahir Ali*

Associate Professor, Department of Education, AFU,
Faridabad, (Haryana)