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Challenges and limitations in the teacher's role as a counselor during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

In the conditions of online education, more and more students face states of anxiety or depression, which have effects on their school performance and on their general physical and emotional state. In this situation, it is necessary that teachers, beyond the subjects they must teach, offer time and attention to the issues related to students counseling, to overcome the difficult moments in which the students find themselves. Using the focus-group method, the present study shows perceptions and opinions of teachers from Caraş-Severin County (Romania), regarding to the counseling activity carried out during the pandemic with COVID-19. This study provides an overview of the beneficiaries of the counseling process, the types of issues for which they seek psycho-pedagogical counseling, identifies the attitudes of the counseled individuals towards counseling activities, illustrates the qualities required of a teacher to fulfill the role of a counselor, and highlights the challenges and limitations associated with conducting counseling activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are the primary beneficiaries of counseling activities, as stated by 100% of the participants, according to the data collected. Psycho-pedagogical counseling focuses primarily on learning difficulties, which make up 75% of the issues addressed by instructors. Personal development and family counseling comprise the majority of counseling activities (22.62% and 16.67%, respectively). The majority of participating instructors (67.87%) characterizes the individuals counseled as cooperative. According to the opinions of 38.10% of instructors, empathy is the most essential attribute of a counselor-teacher. The promotion of health and well-being, as indicated by 84.52% of teachers, is a significant challenge in counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the primary limitation of the psycho-pedagogical counseling relationship developed by teachers during the pandemic is nonverbal behavior, which is significantly more difficult to observe, analyze, and interpret in online activities (52.38%).

Keywords – Counseling; Teacher; Role; Counselor; Challenges; Limitations.

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1 Introduction

Psycho-pedagogical counseling is addressed to students, parents, teachers, etc. – respectively to those people who go through various learning experiences – to form and develop their own personality. Person-centered counseling involves an empathizing process between the counselor and the counseled person during the counseling relationship, to identify appropriate and real solutions to the problems that require our attention. For Gustad (apud Micleuşanu & Cuzneţov, 2015, p. 56), counseling is defined as a process of orientation – learning that takes place in the space of reality created between two people, a couple, in which the counselor with a competence in psychological issues, offers his client appropriate methods to his needs, in relation to the context of life events, in this way establishing a personal program of overcoming difficulties.

Inskipp and John (apud Oancea, 2002, p.23) define counseling to relate and respond to another person, to help them explore their thoughts, emotions, and behavior towards gaining clearer self-understanding and learning to find and use its strongest parts / resources so they can face life more efficiently, making appropriate decisions and acting accordingly. Wallis (apud Micleuşanu & Cuzneţov, 2015, pp. 8-9) considers that counseling is a dialogue in which one person helps another who has significant difficulties.

Counseling can be viewed as an art that assists others in resolving their issues and challenges in life (Chandra, 2002). Counseling is a procedure that can be intervention-based or developmental. Counselors concentrate on their clients' goals. Thus, counseling requires both choice and transformation (Karunanayake, Chandrapala, & Vimukthi, 2020).

Objective knowledge and understanding of human behaviors are fundamental requirements for those who engage in the counseling process (Neamţu, 2016, p. 45).

The efficiency of the counseling process depends mostly on how certain principles are followed, such as: confidentiality, unconditionally positive attitude towards the client, avoiding preconceived notions and premature conclusions, empathic reaction, but also empathetic attitude with the client.

The teacher in the pedagogical counseling process can approach different attitudes, directive or non-directive, depending on the specifics of each case, but especially on the experience and competences of each teacher to successfully fulfill the role of school counselor.

In person-centered counseling it is generally recommended that the teacher-counselor adopt a non-directive position, for example the counselor should not give advice, should not criticize, interpret, or provoke the counseled person to follow a certain required “recipe” for success imposed from the outside by the teacher as a counselor. On the contrary, the counselor's attitude, which strengthens people's innate ability to be agents of their own change, can be extremely helpful. In this context, psycho-pedagogical counseling does not focus on the problem itself, but on the client as a person. The

goal is self-discovery and acceptance for the person to function by becoming able to make decisions, now and here.

The counselor, in the success of his act, needs a set of skills / competences. Among these competences we mention (Micleuşanu & Cuzneţov, 2015, p. 52):

- active listening: aims at listening carefully to the counselor and encouraging through verbal and nonverbal behavior the open expression of problems;
- observation: refers to the counselor's competence to notice details of the subject's verbal and nonverbal behavior, to notice the congruence between the two forms of communication, but also to identify his feelings;
- addressing questions requires attention in the selection of types of questions and even when they are addressed;
- providing feedback: providing realistic and effective feedback is a skill that supports effective communication between counselor and counselor. All the time, the feedback must be focused on the positive aspects, it must be constructive and focused on a specific behavior. When we offer a feedback, we must do it immediately to reinforce the behavior;
- provision of information: this competence aims at using a common language to the one of the beneficiaries. The amount of information should not be very large, the information must be sufficient and correct to make responsible decisions;
- paraphrasing: reformulating what we consider essential in a message;
- summary: aims at organized verbalization of the most important ideas in the interlocutor's speech. This is always done together with the beneficiary of the counseling;
- reflection: this competence aims at expressing the counselor's understanding of both the informational content and the emotional state transmitted by the subject. The purpose of the reflection is to verify the degree of understanding of those related by the interlocutor, to communicate his understanding, but also his unconditional acceptance.

The idea of conducting a research using the focus group method with teachers who teach in primary school, middle school, high school, came from the desire to give them the opportunity to express their views on the role of counselor played by the teacher in the activity with the students, especially in the specific conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The development of these activities allowed teachers to reflect on how student counseling has beneficial effects on students in general and to see in which way these activities can lead to positive results in the personal development of students, which can also lead to increasing their academic performance.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 The purpose of the research

Identifying the perception of the professors participating in the research regarding the exercise of the role of counselor during the pandemic with COVID-19.

2.2 Specific objectives of the research

The specific objectives of the research are:

- identification of persons in need of counseling services / activities;
- specifying the type of problems for which psycho-pedagogical counseling is requested;
- identifying the attitude of the counseled persons towards the counseling activity;
- highlighting the required qualities of a teacher to perform the role of counselor, the nature of the challenges and limitations associated with carrying out counseling activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Target group

The research was attended by 84 teachers from Caraş-Severin County (28 teachers in primary education; 28 teachers in secondary education; 28 teachers in high school) of which 42 live in urban areas and 42 in rural areas. A small part of the teachers participating in the research hold the positions of school counselors (7 people), the rest being regular teachers who teach at different levels of education. The latter carry out counseling activities with students either due to their role as teachers, or as simple teachers in the class who pay special attention to the relationship with the class of students.

2.4 Research methodology

The method used was focus group. The target group was divided into 7 subgroups of 12 people each. The focus group method was applied in each subgroup. Each subgroup included:

- 4 teachers in primary education (2 teachers in rural areas and 2 teachers in urban areas);
- 4 teachers in secondary education (2 teachers in rural areas and 2 teachers in urban areas);
- 4 teachers from high school (2 teachers from rural areas and 2 teachers from urban areas).

Through the focus group, the aim was to obtain qualitative data that capture the perceptions and opinions of teachers in connection with the exercise of the role of advisor by teachers, but also quantitative data of a numerical type.

Each teacher participating in the focus group received a set of 7 items that were discussed / debated within the focus group. At the end of the activity, the answers were recorded, and the data obtained for each item for this research were inventoried. The focus group activity of each subgroup took place over 90 minutes. The professors participating in the research were encouraged to answer honestly, stating that in the end their answers will be noted, without recording the names of those who issued those opinions. The answers were statistically processed.

The data has been collected through the focus group method, carried out online.

3 Results

3.1 Presentation and interpretation of data

The presentation and interpretation of the data was based on the 7 items followed by the research participants in the focus groups.

Item 1: Who are your counseling activities for?

In the first item, the following data specified in Table 1 were obtained from the professors participating in the research.

Table 1

Variable	Number of answers	%
Students	84	100.00 %
Parents	33	39.29%
Professors	15	17.86%

Source: our elaboration

Item 2. What are the issues for which you exercise the role of advisor?

The data obtained in the second item from the professors participating in the research can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Variable	Number of answers	%
Difficulties in learning	63	75.00%
Difficulties in adapting to school requirements	36	42.86%
Risk of dropping out of school	12	14.29%
Existential crises due to age	37	44.05%
Family issues	19	22.62%
Parents working abroad	21	25.00%
Vocational guidance	24	28.57%
Violence/Bullying at school	41	48.81%

Source: our elaboration

The most frequently cited problem for which 75% of teachers participating in focus group are engaged in advisory activities is related to the difficulties encountered by certain students at school, which affects their educational performance. Obviously, there are a lot of factors that lead students to achieve below their real potential, which is why the teachers say that they pay special attention to identifying these causes and how each of them affects a student's academic performance. Some students who have difficulty learning are very absent from school and therefore are at risk of remaining correct in certain subjects or even at risk of dropping out of school. For them, school often becomes the place where they do not feel appreciated, valued properly, which can lead them to make the decision to drop out of school. At the same time, the lack of parental control is due to age (students, high school students are less supervised and supported by parents, compared to students in primary or middle school) or specific circumstances (parents are working abroad or parents live in the rural area, and they came to school at city). Also, the unstable environment in economic, emotional, cultural, so on of some families can cause among the children who come from those families offers a state of insecurity, permanent stress, which can lead to widespread states of anxiety, depression, or violence in certain cases. Teachers experience elevated levels of tension on a daily basis as a result of responsibilities such as educating students, administering classrooms, meeting administrative requirements, and addressing the diverse needs of students. This tension can have a significant impact on their health, job satisfaction, and classroom performance. Teachers are impacted by interconnected stressors in their personal lives, the lives of their students, and the larger societal context, which exacerbates the difficulties they face in sustaining their own well-being and effectively educating their students (Robinson et al., 2023). Stressed instructors can have a negative impact on the well-being of their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The added burden of delivering academic content during the pandemic can have a negative effect

on teachers' physical and mental health, thereby influencing the school environment, student outcomes, and teacher retention. Due to tension and dissatisfaction with how schools handled the situation, many teachers departed the profession (Arens & Morin, 2016).

In the teachers participating opinion in the research, the difficulties of adapting to the school requirements concern aspects related to the students' non-observance of school norms, such as: repeated delays, inadequate clothing, strident make-up (among some students), homework, so on. Furthermore, the abrupt transition to online school posed a significant challenge for students, teachers, and parents. This change brought with it a series of difficulties for all those involved, as well as the need to adapt to the requirements of online schooling. Violence at school remains a widespread phenomenon in schools, which determines teachers to carry out counseling activities with a preventive role, but also ameliorating if the acts of violence occurred and affected the students in the class. Teachers say that lately they have been reported cases of cyberbullying, which seem to have increased in number and intensity during online education.

Item 3. What kind of counseling did you provide to students, parents, teachers?

The data obtained in the third item from the professors participating in the research can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Variable	Number of answers	%
Individually	84	100.00%
Group – personal development groups	19	22.62%
Family counseling	14	16.67%

Source: our elaboration

Regarding the type of counseling carried out with students, parents, teachers, all teachers stated that they carry out activities / actions of individual counseling. In many cases, even when the counseled person is a parent, in general it is also about individual counseling, especially since usually only one parent participates in these activities. In individual, person-centered counseling, the counselor's role is holistic: he must create a climate in which the client feels encouraged, free to explore all aspects of the self, now expresses confidence in the client to achieve an identification work plan of solutions, acting more as a mediator, facilitator of solutions. 19 teachers among those participating in the research state that over time they have organized and coordinated personal development activities for students, through which students have managed to get to know each other better, to collaborate much better with

each other, to support each other in moments of difficulty, to make decisions and to assume the consequences of the decisions taken, to increase their self-esteem, to act responsibly considering their interests and those of others, to efficiently manage the available resources. Of the others 84 teachers participating in the research, only 14 state that they have carried out family counseling activities. Most of those who counseled the family said that the counseled families were willing to cooperate, which over time has resulted in improved school performance for students whose families have benefited from counseling activities.

Item 4. What is the attitude of students, parents, teachers towards counseling activities?

Table 4 shows the data obtained in the fourth item.

Table 4

Variable	Number of answers	%
Cooperative	57	67.86%
Passive / indifferent	15	17.86%
Avoid	12	14.29%
Aggressive	23	27.38%

Source: our elaboration

The success of a counseling activity depends on the ability to express ideas in a simple, precise, direct way as well as the transmission of a small amount of information at once. Sometimes the counselor faces a series of fears, such as fear of the unknown, fear of ridicule, fear of not being judged by others, fear of mistake or failure, etc. The large number of people who show cooperation in the counseling process leads us to believe that these teachers manage to gain the trust of counselors, a basic condition in approaching the counseling process. However, some of the people with whom teachers initiate counseling activities maintain during their process an attitude of obvious distrust, manifested either by a state of passivity or even indifference, or by excessive shyness or a tendency to withdraw, or through a behavior that avoids any commitment to taking on change. A teacher with a lot of tact and a vocation as a counselor will have a lot of patience with these people, knowing that for some of their life stories they have been strengthened by the conviction that they cannot trust others too much and that is why it is difficult for them to give up to the state of passivity, of real or masked indifference, to adopt responsible behaviors, oriented towards personal development and the improvement of school performances. A negative attitude toward counseling may also result from the interaction of factors such

as a lack of professionalism and competence in the counseling process, limited availability of resources, limited practical knowledge, and a low level of awareness of school counseling services among students. These factors influence the perception and appreciation of counseling services and can impede the school system's ability to provide efficient support (Karunanayake, Chandrapala, & Vimukthi, 2020).

Item 5. Which of your qualities as a teacher do you consider to be the most important for carrying out psycho-pedagogical counseling activities?

Core listening skills are fundamental counseling abilities or refined techniques that enable the counselor to attend to the speaker with empathy. These competences include active listening, sensitivity to nonverbal indicators, rapport-building, etc.: "Through active listening, rapport, trust, and the speaker's sense of being heard and understood by the counselor or listener are established" (<https://counsellingtutor.com/basic-counselling-skills/>).

The counselor, in the success of his act, needs a set of skills/competences. Among these we mentioned above (Micleuşanu & Cuzneţov, 2015, p. 52):

- active listening: aims at listening carefully to the counselor and encouraging through verbal and nonverbal behavior the open expression of problems;
- observation: refers to the counselor's competence to notice details of the subject's verbal and nonverbal behavior, to notice the congruence between the two forms of communication, but also to identify his feelings;
- addressing questions: requires attention in the selection of types of questions and even when they are addressed;
- providing feedback: providing realistic and effective feedback is a skill that supports effective communication between counselor and counselor. All the time, the feedback must be focused on the positive aspects, it must be constructive and focused on a specific behavior. His offering must be made immediately to reinforce the behavior. Nelson-Jones (2016) distinguishes between observational feedback and experiential feedback. Observational feedback refers to the process of providing information and commentary based on direct and specific observations. This form of feedback focuses on what has been observed in a particular situation or behavior and provides an objective and comprehensive perspective on these observations. The process of offering feedback based on personal or subjective experiences is known as experiential feedback. It focuses on what an individual has felt, experienced, or learned during an experience or activity and shares these impressions with another individual.

Often, experiential feedback is subjective and based on the perceptions, emotions, and perspectives of the individual;

- provision of information: this competence aims at using a language common to that of the beneficiary. The amount of information must not be very large, the information must be sufficient and correct to make responsible decisions;
- paraphrasing: reformulating what we consider essential in a message. The process of paraphrasing involves rephrasing information so that its fundamental meaning is preserved while it is simplified, making it simpler for others to comprehend and engage with (Nelson-Jones, 2016);
- summary: aims at organized verbalization of the most important ideas in the interlocutor's speech; this is always done together with the beneficiary of the counseling;
- reflection: this competence aims at expressing the counselor's understanding of both the informational content and the emotional state transmitted by the subject. The purpose of reflection is to verify the degree of understanding of those related by the interlocutor, to communicate his understanding, but also unconditional acceptance.

The answers given by the teachers participating in the focus groups were centralized in Table 5.

Table 5

Variable	Number of answers	%
Empathy	32	38.10%
The ability to listen actively	17	20.24%
Honesty	5	5.95%
Authenticity	21	25.00%
Optimism	6	7.14%
Knowledge in the field of psycho-pedagogy	3	3.57%

Source: our elaboration

The teacher as a counselor is assigned several characteristics: he possesses his own identity, appreciates, and respects himself, accepts and recognizes his inner strength, is open to others and receptive to change, he makes decisions and assumes responsibilities both for oneself and for others. The counselor is dynamic and active with a sense of humor (Dumitrașcu, 2012, p. 278).

The interpersonal relationship allows to facilitate the change and the development by observing some conditions meant to ensure the success of the counseling activity. In this regard, the teacher uses a

wide range of personal traits to help the counselor respond responsibly and confidently to the counseling process.

Carl Rogers (apud Neamțu & Stan, 2005) defines counseling itself as an interpersonal relationship, which due to the authenticity, but also the sincerity of the counselor, results in increased self-esteem, this being the consequence of a better self-knowledge (Neamțu & Stan, 2005).

The development of psycho-pedagogical counseling activities requires from the teacher a series of qualities meant to make sense of this activity. This article brought the professors participating in the research to a dilemma: which of these qualities is the most important.

According to these data, empathy was nominated by 38.1% of teachers, followed at some distance by authenticity (25%).

Empathy is one of the central dimensions of the counseling relationship. Empathy can be defined as a continuous process in which the counselor leaves aside his own way of living and perceiving reality, choosing to feel and respond to the experiences and perceptions of his client. This feeling can be intense and demanding for the counselor who will, in fact, perceive his client's thoughts and feelings as strongly as if they had occurred in him (Mearns & Thorne, 2010, p. 121).

Item 6. What are, in your opinion, the challenges of the counseling activities carried out in the conditions of the pandemic with COVID-19?

Table 6

Variable	Number of answers	%
Promoting health and well-being	71	84.52%
Self-knowledge and personal development	65	77.38%
Prevention of risky behaviors	35	41.67%
Learning strategies	56	66.67%
Stress and stress control	32	38.10%
Time management	43	51.19%
Career guidance	41	48.81%

Source: our elaboration

Researchers have found that a student's loneliness and social isolation are predictive of depression and consequent anxiety in his or her life. Other mental health issues, such as trauma, suicide, technology addiction, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, familial dysfunction, and numerous others, have

also been highlighted (Pincus, Hannor-Walker, Wright, & Justice, 2020; Wan, 2020; Hou, Xiong, Jiang, Song, & Wang, 2019; Talmus, 2019).

In the conditions of the pandemic with COVID-19, when the risk of infection with the Sars Cov2 virus is particularly high, in the opinion of the professors participating in the research, one of the priorities and challenges of the counseling activity is the promotion of health and well-being (84.52%), respectively of the optimal functioning from a somatic, physiological, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual point of view.

The pandemic of COVID-19 has significantly altered the field of education, including activities related to school counseling and guidance. Students, parents, and teachers have expressed a genuine need for guidance and counseling services for problem-solving and personal development despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic (Ramli & Saputra, 2023). Self-knowledge and personal development (77.38%) are other directions to explore in the conditions of the pandemic with COVID-19. A first step in achieving this goal, according to the teachers participating in the focus group is self-knowledge, strengths and vulnerabilities, awareness of skills, developing skills of assertive relationships with others, manifesting a responsible, creative attitude towards the activity.

The transition to remote and hybrid education raised concerns about “learning loss”. The pandemic resulted in school closures and measures such as mask-wearing, social distancing, and remote learning, making it more difficult to teach and develop relationships in classrooms (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020).

During the school years, students must process an increasing amount of information and operate with the information at the most abstract level possible. This involves the application of effective study strategies. Unfortunately, education during the pandemic suffered seriously, and students performed poorly in school. Learning to learn in online education can be one of the topics that can be addressed with students during counseling classes. 66.67% of the teachers participating in the research consider it necessary to acquire learning strategies appropriate to the present time, able to stimulate and motivate the student to learn.

As you progress in school, it requires the use of increasingly sophisticated study strategies. Counseling classes provide the framework for developing a program for the development of effective learning strategies, which can capitalize on and enrich the learning experience of students and obviously encourages a reflective educational act.

Counseling for the prevention of risky behaviors is another challenge of the period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted by 41.67% of the professors participating in the research. The preventive measures for their protection against infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus are essential, considering that the media is filled with false information that questions the existence and severity of the virus, as well as the effectiveness of protective measures.

Stress is a complex psychosocial phenomenon that arises from the person's confrontation with requirements, tasks, situations that are perceived as difficult, painful or with high stakes for the person in question. Prior to the pandemic, common stressors cited by teachers included a perceived lack of control and influence over classroom decisions and curricula, difficulties in managing student behavior, a sense of insufficient respect for their profession, and a lack of support and resources (Richards, 2012). At the onset of the pandemic, many of these same stressors persisted and were compounded by new concerns regarding physical health, safety, and well-being (Will, 2021; Robinson et al., 2023).

The way in which teachers, students, parents find appropriate answers to the stressful situations they face is the key to a balanced life.

In a constantly changing world, the identification of a realistic vocational path, by capitalizing on existing information about the labor market, corroborated with the skills and abilities of a person is in the opinion of 48.81% of teachers participating in focus groups a necessary step and great interest for students and their families.

Item 7. What are the limits on the exercise of the role of counselor by the teacher during the pandemic with COVID-19?

The data obtained in the seventh item from the professors participating in the research are found in Table 7.

Table 7

Variable	Number of answers	%
Nonverbal behavior is much more difficult to observe, analyze and interpret in the context of online activities	44	52.38%
Absence of skills developed by psycho-pedagogical counseling	13	15.48%
Problems connecting to the internet, to different educational platforms	31	36.90%
Absence of specialists to work in a team with the teacher to increase the efficiency of the counseling process	12	14.29%
Different personality traits of the teacher or counselor that negatively affect the counseling activity	39	46.43%
Lack of motivation	21	25.00%
How to deploy online or face to face	27	32.14%
Time spent on counseling	23	27.38%
Consumption of personal resources – energy, concentration of attention	31	36.90%
Ensuring the privacy of the counseling process	5	5.95%

Source: our elaboration

Feedback plays an important role in the teaching process. Depending on the students' reaction, the teacher builds the following interventions. The fact that students often choose not to open webcams affects the quality of the counseling process conducted online and limits the possibilities for teacher intervention. For 52.38%, the nonverbal behavior of students is much more difficult to observe, analyze and interpret in the conditions of online activities. 15.48% appreciate that they are limited in the activity of counseling students by the absence of skills developed by psycho-pedagogical counseling. In discussions in focus groups, they admit that the counseling activities they carry out with students or parents are often empirical, intuitive, and too little based on a thorough knowledge of the field.

Access to high-speed internet and teaching effectiveness posed significant challenges for instructors providing online classes (Robinson et al., 2023).

Problems of connection to the Internet or on different educational platforms are highlighted by 36.9% of teachers participating in research, while 46.43% consider that certain personality traits of either the teacher or students, parents are a difficult limit to be overcome in the counseling process. In general, a high degree of reactivity (choleric temperament) is brought into discussion, which makes communication difficult in some cases. There are also incriminating attitudes that denote arrogance, criticism, indifference, aggression, sarcasm, irony, rigidity, anger, fear, etc.

The lack of motivation for either the student, the teacher or both is indicated by 25% of the teachers participating in the focus group as a limitation regarding the exercise of the role of counselor by the teacher.

Another limitation highlighted by the professors participating in the research is related to the way of carrying out counseling activities both face to face and online. One of the difficulties felt during the pandemic by a significant part of those living in rural areas was related to the absence of digital skills, as well as electronic distance communication devices. In this sense, many teachers, even taking the risk of falling ill with the dreaded virus, went to the homes of some students, at first to distribute certain work materials (especially worksheets), and then when tablets were received from the government to be distributed to students from families with financial difficulties and to teach them how to use these devices so that they could participate in online courses. Gradually, online activities became commonplace, and online counseling activities tried to make up for the lack of communication and socialization as much as possible.

The consumption of personal resources, respectively energy, attention, motivation was perceived by the teachers participating in the research as quite high. The need to adapt to online education on the part of both teachers and students has led to the allocation of additional time for study and the exploration of online work tools that make the lessons attractive, interactive. Most teachers who felt the need to benefit from counseling themselves complained about the lack of time, but especially said they were

disappointed by the low involvement of students in teaching activities. Many of the students connect only formally; many of them, in the absence of adequate parental control, are distracted from the learning activity with other activities perceived by the students to be much more interesting. Under these conditions, even the counseling activity carried out online with students who do not open their video cameras risks becoming formal and, in some situations, even useless, according to the opinion of some professors participating in the research.

The widespread adoption of online education has brought to everyone's attention the problem of % generates in the use of distance communication technology. In these conditions, finding an effective time different from the classes in which students participate in online counseling activities was a real challenge for 27.38%. Ensuring the privacy of the counseling process becomes difficult especially in situations where the student cannot retire to a separate room to talk quietly with the counselor, to tell him what is bothering him, to identify with him and without other witnesses the best solutions to his problems.

4 Conclusions

The purpose of counseling is to provide support to people in need to adapt to new living conditions, to find solutions to situations and problems they face regardless of their nature: material, emotional, family. The essence of the counseling process involves two essential steps: 1) creating the link between the counselor and the counselor and 2) facilitating change based on a working alliance.

The present research revealed the following aspects, regarding the exercise by the teacher of the role of counselor:

- the direct beneficiaries of the counseling activities are first the students (100%), then the parents and teachers;
- at the top of the problems for which the teachers participating in the research carry out psycho-pedagogical counseling activities are the learning difficulties (75%);
- all the interviewed teachers stated that they carry out individual counseling activities (of students, parents, teachers), complemented by personal development activities (22.62%) and family counseling (16.67%);
- 67.87% of the professors participating in the research characterize the counseled people with whom they worked as cooperators;
- in the opinion of 38.10% of the teachers participating in the focus group, empathy is the most important quality of a counselor teacher;

- one of the most important challenges of the counseling activity during the pandemic with COVID-19, for 84.52% of the teachers participating in the research, is the promotion of health and well-being among students, teachers, parents, etc.;
- the main limitation of the psycho-pedagogical counseling relationship developed by the teacher during the pandemic with COVID-19, according to the opinion of the teachers participating in the research, is given by the nonverbal behavior which is much more difficult to observe, analyze and interpret in online activities (52, 38%).

The teacher by exercising his role of counselor is concerned to maintain permanent collaboration with students, parents, other teachers to support the student in his training / development as an autonomous, creative, responsible personality, aiming to achieve an effective educational partnership, aimed at maintaining a harmony and balance in the school or family environment, to ensure an educational optimum.

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