

# Guidance and Counselling Practices in Schools: Role, Significance and Challenges for Teachers in India

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## Abstract

Education has been defined differently. Ultimately, it aims at the holistic development of the child. Guidance and counselling play an important role in it. It is one of the major characteristics of teaching. Therefore, teaching and counselling become two sides of the same coin in a school environment. This paper aims to understand the evolution of guidance and counselling in India, along with its need in schools, the role of teachers, skills required, and challenges in implementation through a qualitative narrative review. The paper uses secondary sources as data and involves an analysis of policy documents, frameworks, research, and journals from 2014 to 2025. The paper thus explains the need, role of teachers, skills required, and challenges faced by them in implementing guidance and counselling in schools. The paper also puts forward recommendations for the improvement and better implementation of guidance and counselling practices than the present status of scenarios in schools. This paper will therefore be useful for teachers, counselors, researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders related to school education.

**Keywords:** Guidance and Counselling, Teaching, Teacher, India, Evolution, Need, Challenges

Education aims at the holistic development of a child. NEP 2020 describes education as the “fundamental aimed at achieving the full potential of an individual, along with developing an equitable and just society promoting national development” (pg. 3). Education may be classified into three types: formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal education has a well-defined structure with a regulated framework, and requires active participation from the learner. Contact between teacher and student is a crucial part of this. Non-formal education can be defined as semi-structured with a flexible curriculum and minimal or optional contact between teacher and student. In comparison to both, informal education is an implicit form with or without any specific objective that depends on the interest of the child involved (Melnic & Botez, 2014).

Formal education is the primary type of education which takes place in schools. Schooling becomes an important component of it, and so do teachers who facilitate the teaching and learning process. Morrison (1934) defines teaching as the process that includes intimate contact between two people, where the more mature personality elevates the education of the less mature (as cited in Rajagopalan, 2019). The major characteristic of teaching is communication between two individuals aimed at guiding the less informed person. It includes listening to the queries of the learner, understanding them, and planning according to

the child's needs and requirements. Teaching also involves helping the learner achieve desired goals by creating a conducive environment for growth and development. In addition, it requires the teacher to support students in adjusting to social situations, maintaining psychological well-being, and overcoming mental stress. These characteristics are similar to those found in guidance and counselling, which involves paying attention to the concerns of students, helping them resolve their difficulties, and enabling them to find clarity and emotional balance. Thus, guidance and counselling play an important role as components of education (Antelm Lanzat, 2020; Broglia, 2018; Rodríguez-Conde, 2021).

The purpose of guidance and counselling, in general, is to help individuals become a person who has various insights, views, interpretations, choices, adjustments, and skills in life and can adapt and adjust to their environment (Wichgers, 2022). It may address the social, mental, psychological, or emotional challenges faced by the child. Moreover, guidance and counselling is the process of systematically aiding individuals or groups to understand and use broadly the educational, positional, and personal opportunities they have, which need to be developed, and are also made to be able to adjust to their environment (Amor, 2021; Opondo, 2020; Rodríguez, 2022). To strive for a healthy and prosperous teaching and learning atmosphere is also one of its aims (Sulistiyana, 2019). Teaching, guidance, and counselling thus function as complementary processes within the school environment.

### **Concept of Guidance and Counselling**

Although used as a single phrase and concept, guidance and counselling are two different processes, which overlap but aim at different purposes, even for the same population.

Guidance is a term that is used to describe general information or advice given by a more experienced person to a less experienced one, as assistance in decision-making. It can be both formal and informal. Human uniqueness, goodness, worth, and dignity function as the philosophy behind it (NCERT, 2008). The function of guidance is preventive and developmental in nature, whereas that of counselling is more of a supportive, remedial work (Lai-Yeung, 2014). It is usually related to academic growth, career options, and may not necessarily require a professionally trained resource person. It is defined as a process that continues from the cradle to the grave, like education, and that acts as a "torch in the dark forest" that helps a child find light for the next step, one aimed at self-actualization of one's full potential (Kumar, 2018).

On the other hand, counselling is often written with guidance as though both are same (Bentley, 2019). It is a more structured concept where professional assistance and guidance are provided for the resolution of personal problems. This is a one-to-one process, offered to children dealing with specific problems and need help to overcome them (Arun & Sivakumar, 2018). Topics related to students' socio-psychological concerns that cause emotional or mental stress are dealt within it. Counselling is more related to talk therapy and requires the need to have a professionally trained counsellor (Adu and Nimu, 2023).

### **Research Question**

- What is the evolution and perspective of educational policies in India regarding guidance and counselling?
- What are the needs, teachers' roles, required competencies, and challenges associated with the implementation of guidance and counselling in Indian schools?

## Method

This paper adopts a qualitative narrative review approach to examine the evolution of guidance and counselling in India, along with its needs, teachers' roles, required skills, and associated challenges. The scope of the review is limited to secondary sources, including national education policies and curriculum frameworks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and books in the field of guidance and counselling. The review primarily covers literature published between 2014 and 2025. A narrative and descriptive mode of analysis has been used to synthesize and organize the literature.

## Evolution of Guidance and Counselling

The modern history of guidance and counselling in India began with the establishment of the psychological laboratory at Calcutta University in 1915 and as an academic discipline in 1938 under the direction of G.S Bose. The 1938 Acharya Narendra Dev Committee significantly brought attention into its pivotal role in the field of education. Vocational Guidance Bureau was established in 1941 at Bombay University. (Saxena and Wadhvani, 2022)

Guidance and counselling have been an important concern in India's educational policies, commissions, and reports, and have evolved over the years. Malik and Andleeb (2026) divide this evolution into four phases: Phase I - Foundational from 1951 to 1985, Phase II – Policy formation from 1986 to 2010, Phase III – Implementation from 2011 to 2019, and the latest Phase IV – Transition, from the period after NEP 2020.

## Policy Perspective of Guidance and Counselling

The first among commissions for school education in India was the Secondary Education Commission (1952-1953). Guidance was stated as the responsibility of providing a child with the help needed in “the whole gamut of youth problems,” under a cooperating responsibility of all, which included teachers, parents, principle under the guidance of a specialized guidance officer who had special training in the field. The four major principles that the commission stated for guidance were: recognizing personal differences, providing accurate, comprehensive, and continuous information about institutions of higher studies, providing guidance at different stages of the pupil, and providing for reconsideration of their plan at different stages.

The Education Commission report (1966) defined guidance as “both adjustive and developmental.” It further stated guidance to be a continuous integral part of education, aimed at all. At the primary school level, it emphasised making the transition from home to school easy, diagnosing learning difficulties, the need for special education, helping potential drop-outs, insights to world of work, and assistance to further education and training. In secondary education, the commission stated the function of guidance to be in helping students to identify their interests and abilities, awareness about educational and vocational opportunities, and making plans for their personal and social adjustment.

In 1968, the first National Policy on Education was adopted. Although it did not directly in explicit commented about guidance and counselling in school, it emphasised that “talent in diverse fields should be identified at as early an age as possible.” While such a statement does not necessarily describe guidance and counselling as a practice in school education, the relevance becomes clearer when it is read in conjunction with the Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), on the courses of which the policy was largely developed.

NCF 1988 highlighted the emotional crisis, strain, and stress that a child may be in at several phases of

schooling. The role of counselling and guidance in such a crucial area of career choice and adjustment is reflected in the framework, especially during the upper primary and secondary stages. The second education policy came in 1986, which was later revised under the Plan of Action 1992. The document explicitly states the important role of guidance and counselling in assisting students in their choices of vocational courses. Furthermore, NCF 2000 stated the need for each school to have a counsellor, ideally, to tackle this issue and provide students with appropriate guidance. In case it was not possible, it required the need to have at least a visiting counsellor for a cluster of three to four schools. It also suggested the need for SCERTs to open a guidance cell for providing training provision and developing materials accordingly.

The NCF 2005, too, in the light of previous frameworks suggest the need for guidance and counselling of students about the adjustment and career-related aspects of their growth. It also highlights the stress faced by students during the public examination and suggests the opening of helplines to help students in need. The framework also states the need to strengthen the guidance cell at SCERTs and widen its position as a resource centre for training by including in-service training, production of psychological tools/tests, etc. The third and the latest policy in the series is the National Education Policy of 2020. Compared to the previous policies, it describes the role of guidance and counselling in a much more elaborate manner. The need to understand the emotional and mental health of students, career guidance, mentoring, handling stress, and emotional well-being is highlighted in the document, along with the role of teachers and counsellors in it. It also mandates the need for a professional counsellor at cluster level.

NCFSE 2023, developed in alignment with NEP 2020, is the latest in the sequence of curriculum frameworks. It has a special chapter itself dedicated to it, titled “Chapter 5: Guidance and Counselling” under “Part B: Cross-Cutting Themes.” The chapter defines the meaning and difference of the terms along with the role of teachers, the person eligible, approaches, and expected outcomes. A key aspect to note is that among the roles it states for counsellors. Other than health and well-being aspects along with academic and career counselling, it defines the role of counsellors as participants in providing support to administrative and systematic improvement, where their understanding of diversity and learners can truly contribute for better schooling experience of a child. The framework also states the need to have a professional counsellor at the level of a cluster of schools or a school complex.

### **Need for Guidance and Counselling in School Education**

Guidance and counselling are regarded as the third important dimension of education and an integral part of the educational system (Kumar, 2024). The aim of it in school should be seen from a perspective of promoting mental health rather than as a venue for curing. The purpose should be to help individuals identify their personal attributes and qualities, enabling them to understand their strengths and weaknesses, respond positively to challenges, and ultimately develop and actualize themselves in social life (Kettunen, 2018).

The care that needs to be ascertained in school is in bringing awareness about the role of emotional, mental, psychological, and social health of the child. It may include the campaign against drug abuse, the healthy way of using social media and technology, good touch-bad touch, etc., or any other issue that the school thinks is essential as per the needs of the time and society. The ultimate aim should be “preventive, promotive and conservative perspective rather than one based on cure” (Ranganathan & Wadhwa, 2024). It also plays an important role in helping students to adjust in transition to a new social environment in school from their family. It helps the children to cope with emotional changes during different stages of

development, in the selection of vocational courses, and in resolving academic-related stress and also in the identification of children with special needs, differently abled or gifted. NEP 2020 states that individual students or cohorts of students may have needs that the school may meet through a system of guidance and counselling provided by the school. Research also states that guidance and counselling help in improving student discipline in classrooms, along with assisting the effective teaching and learning process and character education (Sitinjak & Canu, 2023; Salgong & Ngumi, 2016; Farozin et al., 2020). In understanding the child before selecting, planning, implementing, and evaluating curriculum lies the meaningful transaction of a healthy learning experience. “Any system of education founded on theories of academic perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind” (Sri Aurobindo, 2016, p. 21). Therefore, it provides a path for a deeper understanding of the child’s qualities that the educator should consider while choosing the learning experiences in school. Students require guidance and counselling to develop their academic, social, and personal competencies, along with psychological disorder and help them to cope with them (Kumar, 2016).

### **Role of Teachers in Guidance and Counselling**

Teaching, guidance, and counselling are complementary processes. All the three processes aim to make a child realise their potential. While teaching is related to knowledge acquisition and holistic development of a child, guidance and counselling help one to tackle the problems one faces in social, emotional, and mental health, along with the strain and pain related to academic and career choices. In the process of teaching-learning, guidance and counselling have two functions; (a) assist teachers in solving educational problems, aimed at improving relationship of teacher with students and (b) assist the students to solve educational problems by helping one to make decisions about career choices, accumulate information about vocational courses other than resolving issues of emotional, social, and mental health. (Arumugam et al. 2021)

The following incident, drawn from a real examination-day interaction, illustrates the often-overlooked counselling dimension of teaching.

A Class X student, after appearing for his board examination in science, called his teacher later that evening with an unusual question: “Is coffee bad for health?” Upon further probing, the teacher discovered that the student had stayed awake the previous night preparing for the examination and, deviating from his usual routine, consumed coffee beforehand. After perceiving his performance as unsatisfactory, he attributed his mistakes to this single change in routine.

Recognizing the underlying anxiety, the teacher reassured the student that a single cup of coffee was unlikely to affect his performance and helped him reflect more realistically on his preparation and exam experience.

Beneath the seemingly trivial question lay anxiety, self-doubt, and an urgent need for reassurance.

Such interactions highlight a crucial concern: Are teachers adequately prepared to respond to the emotional and psychological needs that students bring into academic spaces?

“Teachers truly shape the future of our children - and, therefore, the future of our nation” (NEP 2020, para 5.1). The role of teachers in formal education cannot be overlooked. They form a key element in the schooling of a child. They act as the bridge between society, school, curriculum, and the child. Therefore, they play a crucial role in every aspect of schooling, including guidance and counselling.

Each child is different, and so is the difference that they bring into a classroom with their own learning style, learning potential, and child personality profile with unique strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand the child. The teacher, thus, in a classroom needs to create learning experiences effective in catering to such children's needs (Tudor, 2013).

Human psychology is a culturally and contextually based study. The understanding of a student's mental health can be viewed from two perspectives: idiographic and nomothetic. While the nomothetic perspective investigates the universal aspect of behaviour, the idiographic perspective focuses on child differences based on the context of a child. It is in the understanding of the nuances of students' behaviour in the idiographic perspective that a teacher plays an important role in the guidance and counselling aspect in schools (Ranganathan & Wadhwa, 2024).

### Skills Required by Teachers as a Guidance and Counselling Practitioner

The skills that are expected from a teacher in the role of a counsellor include the following:

- **Continuous observation:** Observation is the foundational activity that everyone indulges in a social atmosphere (Ciesielska et al., 2017). It can be both watching and listening to a child's behaviour in a classroom that helps a teacher to analyse the change and disturbance that a child may be going through. It can be seen as the primary source in the identification of the problem, too.
- **Identification of problem:** Teachers, with their day-to-day interactions with students, play a crucial role in the school environment. They act as a rich source of information about various characteristics of children and thus identify the issues and concerns of the child or their abilities. Prieto et al. (2004) state that "the teacher is a very important source of information for valuing the capacities of the children during the teaching learning processes."
- **Communication skills:** "Classroom is a complex communication space" (Muste, 2016). Therefore, it becomes important for a teacher to be well-equipped in communication skills that also act as the bridge in rapport formation, trust formation, and an open space for dialogue among students and teachers.
- **Knowledge about basic concepts of educational psychology:** Psychology is the study associated with understanding human behaviour. The aim of education is to bring desirable change in an individual's behaviour. Therefore, a basic understanding of the subject helps a teacher to respond accordingly to a child's needs and to apply particular learning processes as per the characteristics of the learner (Azura et al., 2022). Observation, with an understanding of psychology, also leads to effective identification and interpretation of a student's behaviour.
- **Skills of connecting subject to vocation:** Teachers should connect topics and content taught in the classroom to real-life applications and the vocational field associated with it, thus providing guidance implicitly along with the subject.
- **Students' motivation:** The teacher plays an irreplaceable and crucial role in the process of teaching-learning. But effective learning lies in a teacher's ability to maintain the interest with which the child approached a subject in the initial stage. Activities such as giving frequent feedback, ensuring opportunities, creating a learning environment, and helping a child feel valuable can motivate a child for better performance and learning (Obot et al., 2014).
- **Knowing the abilities of a child:** Each child brings with them their own characteristics and behaviour. Thus, by understanding the child's abilities, a teacher will be able to plan learning activities as per the needs and learning level of the child, thereby catering to individual differences in the classroom.

### Present Status in India

The most important change of the last decade is the introduction and implementation of NEP 2020. It provides ample recognition to guidance and counselling as an important and integral component in the school curriculum framework. The policy states that, “there will also be professional academic and career counselling available to all students, as well as counsellors to ensure physical, psychological and emotional well-being.” (para 12.4)

The NCFSE 2023 also recognizes and differentiates the need for guidance and counselling in school. It recognizes guidance and counselling as an essential process, and a part of the curriculum for the health and well-being of members of the school community, which includes: physical and mental health, psychological health, social participation, cognitive health and learning needs; academic and career counselling, and the need for counsellors in participating as a support for administrative and systematic improvements. The framework also differentiates between the concepts of guidance and counselling. While it defines guidance as assisting a child in making an informed decision, it defines counselling as an individual consulting for one who requires the services of a skilled and trained child.

While the recent policy and framework highlight the need for mental health, the ground reality remains uneven. As per the NCERT conducted national survey “Mental Health and Well- Being of School Students, 2022”, while 73% student showed satisfaction with school life and 84% the responsibility of doing well, 28.4% students hesitated in asking questions, 23% in initiating conversation, 33% comply with peer pressure, and 81% have causes of anxiety. While 67% felt happiness, 11% stated to have feelings of anxiousness, 14% extreme emotions, and 43% reported mood swings. These findings signify the need for greater attention and systematic engagement in the field of guidance and counselling in schools.

### Challenges in Indian Schools

The challenges identified in implementing guidance and counselling in schools include:

- **Lack of trained counsellors:** Internationally, the American School Counsellor Association recommends a ratio of one counsellor for every 250 children for effective service. In India, this ratio remains high. For example, the latest regulation from CBSE requires a school to have a counselling and wellness teacher at a ratio of 1:500, while it offers the option to have a career counsellor part-time in schools where the number of students is less than three hundred. Such a ratio will only increase the burden on counsellors, even if there is one in a school. Overburdened counsellors struggle to provide individualized attention (Schmidt, 2020). Also, the part-time appointment will only burden the appointed person and will reduce the scope of childcare. (Poonam & Khushboo, 2025)
- **Access to counselling:** Counselling as a service that is available to one is an issue. The Shah et.al. (2024) state that twenty-five percent of students still do not have access to career counselling, whereas other seven percent lack structured formal support.
- **Lack of awareness of counselling and guidance services:** The school stakeholders are not very aware of the importance of guidance and counselling practices. Moreover, many people remain unaware of the benefits of counselling (Gibson & Mitchell, 2019).
- **Unavailability of resources:** Schools have reported a lack of resources, such as a counselling room, to conduct sessions of guidance and counselling. Many institutions lack trained counsellors and adequate infrastructure (Gysbers, 2020). Moreover, often, school libraries, staffrooms, etc., are stated to be used as the resource room for counselling sessions (More, 2023).

- **Stigma:** Although efforts are being taken to improve mental health, the need for help with problems related to it is often seen as taboo. These social restrictions and taboos have often penetrated the school environment. Examples are found of parents who fear letting their child get help from counsellors when faced with stress (More, 2023).
- **Time constraints:** Teachers often complain about a lack of time as a reason for focusing on other aspects of a child's life. They state themselves to be already burdened with curricular and co-curricular activities. Counsellors also complain about being allocated to other administrative work than what is required of them as counsellors, often hampering their functions (More, 2023).
- **Unavailability of adequate funds:** Funds that are required to cater to the needs of guidance and counselling are in short supply, which only hinders the resolution of issues related to guidance and counselling services. Due to a lack of sufficient and separate funds, the school does not conduct guidance and counselling activities for the progress of students.
- **Teachers' training:** There is a lack of proper training required to make teachers familiar with the concept of guidance and counselling. In most scenarios, guidance and counselling are not even a part of anything other than what is there in the teacher training courses, such as continuous professional development (More, 2023).
- **Lack of parental support:** Social stigma associated with counselling, lack of awareness among parents, especially in rural areas, and lack of identification among them about the child's issue further escalates the gap in services related to guidance and counselling.

### Suggestions and Recommendations

- **Recruitment of counsellors:** The foremost recommendation is the recruitment of professionally trained counsellors in schools. Wherever feasible, efforts should be made to maintain a healthy student–counsellor ratio.
- **Teacher as a counsellor:** Every teacher should develop a mindset as a counsellor in school. A teacher may work as a first-level counsellor, as NEP 2020 Section 5.1 and Para-1 states that, in formal and informal ways, school teachers and school principals have long been naturally vested with the responsibility of guiding and counselling students and families. These members of the school community are best placed to do this because of their continuous contact and connection with students. However, it is essential to clearly distinguish the roles of teachers and counsellors; teachers are not substitutes for professional counsellors but collaborators in the support system. The relationship between teachers and counsellors should function as a two-way collaborative process, wherein counsellors provide professional expertise, and teachers contribute observational insights and early identification of student concerns.
- **Continuous Teacher training:** Teachers should receive foundational training in guidance and counselling as part of their mandatory continuous professional development programs.
- **Adequate Infrastructure:** Adequate infrastructure, including dedicated counselling spaces and institutional support, must be ensured. Counsellors should be relieved from excessive teaching or administrative duties that may interfere with the continuity and quality of counselling services.
- **Implementation of Policy:** Efforts should be made to implement guidelines regarding the ratio of students and counsellors, appointment of counsellors, and regular monitoring and evaluation at the cluster and district levels are strengthened.

- **Continuous meetings with parents:** Frequent meetings with parents, teachers, and counsellors to discuss the needs and behaviour of a child can be crucial from the holistic perspective of the development of a child, and thus should be conducted regularly with a specific time gap. Such initiatives can also help reduce the social stigma associated with counselling and increase parental support.
- **Record keeping:** Systematic record-keeping practices about the holistic development of a child help to identify changes in behaviour, academic performance, and progress by tracking the development to assist guidance and counselling to be provided accordingly at each stage.
- **Alignment with NCF-SE 2023 outcomes:** Schools should align their guidance and counselling practices with the expected outcomes outlined in NCF-SE 2023 (Section 5.4). This includes promoting students' physical and mental well-being, enabling informed academic and career decision-making, supporting diverse learning needs, and strengthening communication among teachers, parents, and students. Such alignment can help students develop self-awareness, coping skills, and the ability to adapt effectively to life's challenges.
- **Inspiring peer counselling in schools:** Schools should develop a system of training for all stakeholders for guidance and counselling practices. Training students and employees to offer basic support under professional supervision (Savickas, 2020).
- **Encouraging alumni and community participation:** It will help in creating more awareness about careers and academic performance for students.

## Conclusion

Guidance and counselling are important aspects of schooling. From early commission to present policy, it has been recognized as an integral part of education. Throughout these policies, it has evolved as understanding about mental health and the role schools may play in it has broadened. From vocational guidance as a central aspect with "the whole gamut of adolescence" in the secondary commission report, it has today developed into a holistic aspect with a focus on mental, emotional, social, academic, and vocational guidance in the latest NEP.

Yet, at the school level, there is a huge gap in the ratio of students and professional counsellors, there is limited funding for conducting guidance and counselling activities, and teachers are already more burdened with teaching along with other non-teaching responsibilities.

While teachers are expected to know the basics of guidance and counselling, their training needs to be improved in this area. It should also be taken care of that while teaching, guidance, and counselling do share the same characteristics to an extent, teachers need to work as counsellors too. NCF 2023 Section 5.1 PP. 189 states that, while teachers and principals will continue playing the role of guides and counsellors, they should also get the basic capacity building in this regard so that they have the required skills and capacities. A professional/specialist at the cluster or school complex level must be appointed as soon as possible, as suggested by NEP 2020. Therefore, strengthening existing systems, providing infrastructure, and up-to-date opportunities for professional development and monitoring lies the way to diminishing the gap and uplifting the process to achieve the aim and vision of the nation's education policy.

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