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Developing a Quality Assurance Framework for Post-Pandemic School Guidance Services

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis significantly disrupted the Philippine educational system and affected students' emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Anxiety, isolation, stress, and loss of interest in school became more pronounced, making school guidance offices important sources of support. Although interest in guidance programs has increased in response to emerging student concerns, research evaluating these programs and their impact remains limited. This study examines the PAASCU Basic Education Instrument and guidance counselors' experiences in highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools to identify limitations in existing guidance-program standards. The researcher used qualitative content analysis, document review, and in-depth interviews with guidance counselors. Findings indicate that many existing standards remain useful, but some need to be reassessed to address students' current needs and the evolving responsibilities of guidance counselors in the post-pandemic learning environment. The study proposes a Guidance Services Delivery Quality Assurance Framework comprising seven interconnected standards: stakeholder-centered programming, resource management, collaborative networks, structured operations, outcomes-based monitoring, continuous improvement, and data protection and privacy. Anchored in the Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model, the framework explains how school resources and processes contribute to student well-being, service impact, and stakeholder satisfaction. It also provides a mechanism for implementation to help ensure that guidance programs and services remain relevant, accountable, and responsive.

Keywords: quality assurance, school guidance programs and services, Philippine basic education, interconnected standards, collaborative networks

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially changed how students learn in schools. Addressing social-emotional needs, diminished motivation, concerns about transitions, mental health concerns, and separation from caring adults are some challenges shared by guidance counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents that students continue to experience. The Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (UPPI, 2021) found rising loneliness and untreated depression among young Filipinos compared to a decade ago. Alarmingly, the Department of Education (DepEd) data reveal a troubling mental health situation among learners: in school year 2021–2022, 404 students died by suicide, over 2,100 attempted suicide, and 776,000 sought guidance support (Pineda, 2023).

During the pandemic, the educational leaders' response stressed the importance of both academic and skills in managing crises and emergencies. This report gives importance to the quality of guidance programs and services offered in schools. The conduct of quality assurance that ensures guidance programs and services meet a certain level of quality is deemed important, given the vital role that guidance counselors play in the development of students. However, research on quality assurance in guidance services remains scarce despite growing recognition. Also, the fragmented standards across accreditation bodies complicate how educational quality is defined and measured in the Philippines, especially in the field of guidance services (Tabora, 2019). The lack of standardized practices creates challenges for schools to further strengthen guidance programs and services with the evolving needs and expectations of students.

The EDCOM II Final Report (2026) suggests continuing educational challenges in schools and the need for more responsive student support services. This report justifies the need for well-established quality assurance practices to strengthen guidance and counseling programs in a dynamic learning environment. The Guidance and Counseling Act (RA 9258, 2024), the Mental Health Act (RA 11036, 2018), and the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act (RA12080, 2024) also expanded the responsibilities of guidance counselors and quality standards governing guidance program delivery.

Taking these concerns into account and recent developments in the field of guidance and mental health, this research study evaluates the quality standards that shape guidance service delivery in highly PAASCU-

accredited basic education schools. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What existing quality assurance standards for guidance services remain in practice but are no longer relevant to the current needs and realities of students?
2. Which relevant quality assurance standards are insufficiently practiced in the delivery of guidance services in highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools?
3. What relevant quality assurance standards are absent from the current quality assurance systems for guidance services?
4. What areas of guidance service delivery require improvement to effectively respond to the post-pandemic realities and evolving needs of students?
5. What quality assurance framework may be proposed to strengthen guidance service delivery in response to the identified gaps and post-pandemic educational realities?

The study adopts the Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model to analyze how institutional inputs contribute to guidance processes and the outcomes that result from them. The present study develops a contextualized quality assurance model to support the effective management of guidance and counseling programs in Philippine basic education. The increasing focus on student well-being, mental health support, and technology-assisted interventions has expanded the responsibilities of guidance counselors beyond traditional functions. As schools adapt to these changing demands, questions arise regarding the continued suitability of existing quality standards used to evaluate guidance programs. Hence, this study examines the PAASCU Basic Education Instrument and the lived experiences of guidance counselors in highly accredited basic education institutions to identify areas where quality assurance standards may need strengthening or updating.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative content analysis design to explore the quality standards that guide the delivery of guidance programs and services in highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools. Qualitative content analysis is useful for examining patterns, meanings, and themes

embedded in texts and narratives. Documents and personal accounts contain valuable insights that can deepen understanding of complex social and educational realities (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022; Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

The study utilized two complementary approaches to content analysis to gain deeper insight into the implementation of quality standards in schools. The manifest analysis focuses on provisions applicable to the guidance practice that the PAASCU Basic Education Instrument specifies. This allows the researcher to identify and document the quality standards expected in implementing guidance programs and services. Meanwhile, latent analysis was used to examine interview results from the guidance counselors of highly accredited basic education schools. This process assisted the researcher in uncovering the interview transcript's more profound meanings, perceptions, assumptions, and challenges (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022). Taken together, the manifest and latent analyses allow the researcher to compare the standards required by PAASCU with the day-to-day realities of running a school guidance program.

The study also employed Bengtsson's (2016) four-phase research process framework. In the program design and planning phase, the research objectives were clearly defined, the sources of data were identified, the criteria for participant selection were determined, and ethical protocols were established. The next phase involved the collection of data from the respondents. The researcher conducted interviews with guidance counselors in highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools. Likewise, a document analysis of the PAASCU Basic Education Instrument was performed. The data gathered underwent a systematic analysis that included a methodical process of coding and interpretation of results.

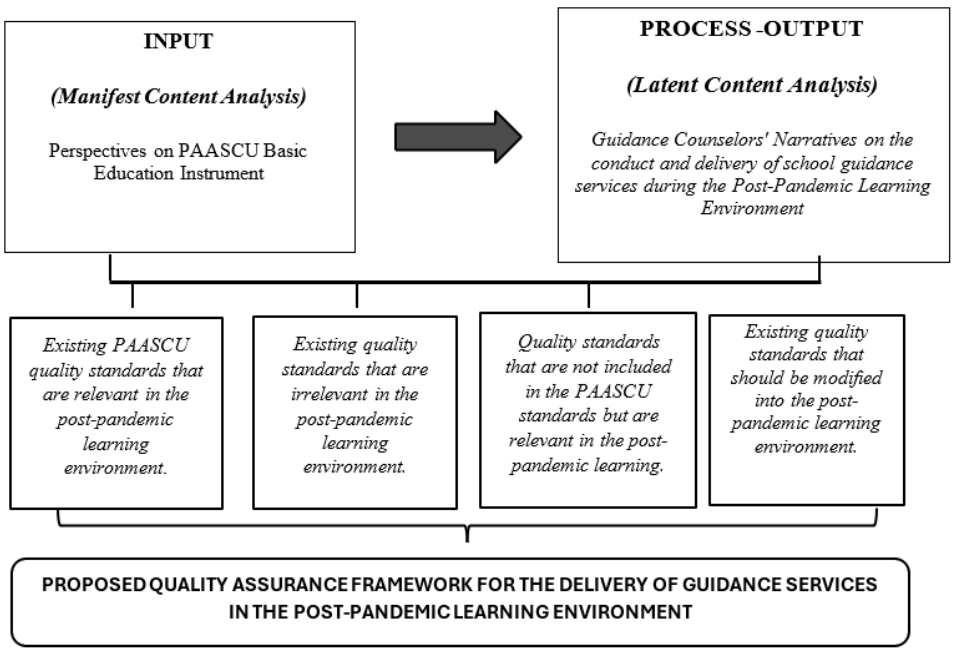
ATLAS.ti assisted the researcher in organizing and managing large amounts of qualitative data. The use of qualitative analysis software supports a structured and transparent analysis process that enables the documentation of analytic decisions and the exploration of interrelationships among themes, which is made possible through this qualitative analysis software (Paulus et al., 2014; Friese, 2022). The researcher also ensures reflexivity during the conduct of the study by recognizing that qualitative inquiry is interpretive and influenced by both professional experiences and theoretical perspectives. Engaging in continuous reflection helped promote balance and credible analysis aligned with the participants' accounts. To conclude the process, the researcher

consolidates the themes and categories and reports the study's major findings.

The study utilized the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model as its theoretical lens in the conduct of both manifest and latent content analysis. This IPO model gave a more profound understanding of how quality standards play a key role in the school guidance programs and practices. The researcher utilized the IPO model in capturing different experiences and views related to quality assurance. The model includes actual processes employed, the results achieved through guidance programs, and the guidance counselors' perspectives and experiences. This study provides a deeper and more detailed perspective on how quality assurance works within the Philippine basic education guidance programs and services.

Figure 1.

Methodological Framework of the Study



Research Instruments

The researcher developed an Interview Protocol Guide (IPG) to better comprehend participants' perspectives through their narratives. The questions were carefully assessed to ensure that they effectively captured the participants' experiences and perspectives. Experts in the field were asked to validate the questions, including guidance program directors, quality assurance specialists and officers, licensed guidance counselors, and faculty members with expertise in qualitative research. The validators' feedback served as the basis for refining the clarity, organization, and relevance of the questions. The validated open-ended questions allowed the participants to reflect on their practices, discuss the challenges they encountered, and share the insights they gained from their experiences.

The PAASCU Basic Education Accreditation Instrument provides the basis for identifying the current standards being used in the guidance practice. The researcher secured permission from the PAASCU Executive Director for the use of the instrument.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sent an email invitation letter to highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools in the National Capital Region and Region 4-A. The schools that showed interest in participating in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form. The researcher provided the participants with sufficient time to review the informed consent form. The participants of the study consisted of nine (9) Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) from eight (8) highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools. The researcher informed the participants that their involvement was entirely voluntary. The interviews were conducted inside the participants' respective offices to ensure privacy and minimize distractions. The researcher allowed the participants to speak freely and reflect on their professional experiences. The interviews, which lasted approximately one hour, were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness. Examples of the open-ended questions included: "How do you deliver counseling services in the post-pandemic learning environment?" and "What challenges have you encountered in the delivery of psychological testing services within the post-pandemic learning context?" Probing questions were also used to clarify responses and explore emerging issues. The use of validated open-ended questions allowed the

researcher to explore participants' experiences in greater depth, which yielded rich qualitative data.

The researcher hired a professional transcriptionist to convert the recorded interviews into written transcripts. The initial transcribed interview notes were returned to the research participants to review their statements, confirm that their views were accurately documented, and provide clarifications or corrections when necessary. This process ensures that the data to be analyzed is credible and accurate. While research participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses through member checking, they were not directly involved in the formal coding procedures or the development of themes. The analysis and interpretation of the data remained the responsibility of the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the in-depth interviews were subjected to qualitative analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to examine and interpret the meanings embedded in both the PAASCU document and the transcripts from the interviewed guidance counselors. The researchers conducted repeated readings of the participants' transcribed interviews and the quality standards outlined in the accreditation instrument to gain a thorough understanding. This was followed by the identification of themes and sub-themes. The process of content analysis follows an inductive approach to allow patterns, categories, and themes to emerge naturally from the data itself (Cho & Lee, 2014).

The initial coding stage includes the process of dividing the data into smaller meaning units. The smaller data units are then labeled and examined to facilitate systematic coding. The results of the initial coding were carried out to help uncover meaningful patterns and ensure the faithfulness of the process to the objectives of the study. This was followed by grouping the codes that reflect similar ideas into broader categories. A coding manual guided the process to ensure coding consistency and to have a better understanding of the categories and themes that emerged from the data.

The next stage involved examination of the data to identify patterns, connections, and differences in the participants' experiences and perspectives. The categories and themes obtained from the interview were analyzed to understand how this was evident with the current standards as reflected in the PAASCU Basic Education Instrument. The analysis

involved repeated review and refinement of the data to accurately reflect both the experiences of the research participants and the content of the accreditation standards (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

This research study also followed Guba's (1981) idea of trustworthiness that includes the criteria of credibility, dependability, and transferability. The credibility of this study was strengthened by being transparent about the coding procedures and allowing participants to review and verify the researcher's interpretations of the data. Dependability was demonstrated in the study by keeping detailed records of coding decisions, methodological procedures, and analytical reflections. Creating a clear audit trail of the research process is important in a qualitative analysis. To support the transferability of the findings, the researcher provides rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations guided the researcher at every stage of the research process, starting from selecting the participants until the data interpretation. Participants received an informed consent form before they participated in the study. The consent form contains an explanation of the purpose of the research, the extent and voluntary nature of their participation, and measures taken to protect privacy and confidentiality. The participants were also informed that they may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or negative consequences. Given that the participants were professional guidance personnel from highly PAASCU-accredited schools, the study involved minimal risk. The researcher also remained attentive to the need to create a respectful and supportive environment throughout the interview process. A supportive environment was created to help participants comfortably share their experiences and to ensure that all information they shared would be treated respectfully and confidentially.

Protecting participants' identities was a priority for the researcher. Personally identifiable information was removed from interview transcripts. Identities of the research participants were protected using pseudonyms. Extra care was also given to safeguard the identity of basic education institutions that participated in this study. A data privacy agreement was signed by the participants that clearly outlines how data would be collected, stored, accessed, and disposed of. The audio recordings and transcripts

related to the interview were saved in files accessible only to the researcher. The researcher also ensured that the research process respected the rights and dignity of the participants. The implementation of the following safeguards contributed to creating a positive and trusting research environment.

Results

The research explored areas where current guidance practices may not always reflect established current standards of quality. Analyzing the institutional conditions that affect program implementation and delivery was conducted. Using manifest content analysis, the PAASCU Basic Education Instrument yielded five major themes that reflect the resources, policy guidelines, organizational set-up, and conditions necessary for effective implementation. The table below presents the five major themes and their corresponding sub-themes, which are aligned with the research questions:

Table 1.

Summary of Themes and Sub-themes of PAASCU Accreditation Standards

Themes	***Sub-themes***	***Sample Statements***
RQ1/T1: *Program Design and Development*	● *Ease of Access and Sufficiency of Services* ● *Clarity* ● *Addressing Diversity of Needs* ● *Prompt Delivery of Services*	● *"The school ensures that student services …. readily accessible to support learners in their academic and non-academic pursuits and promote personal well-being."* ● *"The school has well-defined….. programs for student services to support learners' academic and non-academic needs."* ● *"These programs and services are responsive to the full spectrum of diverse student needs…"* ● *"A student monitoring system in place … instituted on time to respond to learners' needs."*

Table 1.

Continued.

Themes	***Sub-themes***	***Sample Statements***
RQ1/T2*: Resource Management*	● *Personnel Qualification and Availability* ● *Availability of Resources.*	● *"There are adequate … qualified personnel to provide effective and efficient student services and support."* ● *"There are adequate financial and physical resources … to provide effective and efficient student services and support."*
RQ1/T3: *Strategies for Operational Efficiency*	● *Data-driven Mindset* ● *Monitoring Students' Needs and Progress* ● *Collaboration and Partnerships,* ● *Communicating Programs and Partnerships with Stakeholders*	● *The plans or programs for student services and support are well-defined, communicated, and readily made available."* ● "*Plan to provide student services and support and a student monitoring system.*" ● "*The administration, teachers, and Guidance personnel collaborate to deliver these support services"* ● "*The plans or programs for student services and support are well-defined, communicated, and readily made available*."
RQ1/T4: *Flagship Services*	● *Mental Health Activities* ● *Academic Support* ● *Career Guidance* ● *Alumni Relations*	● *"The school ensures that student services and support are adequate … and promote personal well-being."* ● *"The school has well-defined, adequate, and accessible programs for student services to support learners' academic and non-academic needs."* ● "*Provisions for academic-related support, e.g., career counseling, career pathing, etc."* ● "*Processes related to placement and follow-up of graduates or tracer studies."*

Table 1.

Continued.

Themes	*Sub-themes*	*Sample Statements*
RQ1/T5: *Program Performance Monitoring and Enhancement*	● *Program Evaluation and Review* ● *Stakeholders' Satisfaction* ● *Improvement Action Plan*	● *"Measures are regularly undertaken to review the effectiveness of the programs for student services and support and student monitoring systems."* ● *"Measure the effectiveness of the student services programs, including measuring student satisfaction with these services."* ● *"Student services and support and student monitoring systems are improved to meet the learners' needs and expectations."*

The latent content analysis of counselor narratives yielded seven themes capturing guidance counselors' lived experiences, challenges, and responsibilities in post-pandemic service delivery. These narratives provided nuanced insights into how guidance programs and services are implemented in actual practice, respond to student needs, and make adjustments made by guidance counselors to adapt to evolving educational contexts.

Table 2.

Summary of Themes and Sub-themes from the Interviews of Guidance Counselors in Implementing Guidance Programs and Services in the Post-Pandemic Learning Environment

Themes	***Sub-themes***	***Sample Statements***
RQ2/T1: *Data Protection and Privacy*	• *Security Measures Confidentiality Concerns*	• *"Aside from the data privacy law and the non-disclosure agreement, we also have the letter of undertaking; we reiterate it to everyone most especially to the parents, that guidance is a safe space."*
RQ2/T2: *Adaptive Strategies Aligned with Stakeholders' Needs*	• *Transitioning Guidance and Counseling Services to Online Modalities*	• *"Kaya lang, 'yon ang hiling ko na sana magkaroon kami ng sistema. It is a system na p'wedeng daanin sa technology na ang bata mag-iin na doon tapos kung ano ang problem." (What I am hoping for is that we will have a system in place. It should be a technology-based system where students can log in and indicate their concerns or the problems they are experiencing.)*
	• *Responding to Current Needs*	• *"Well, of course, the most important factor that I have to consider is the needs of our client because without knowing the needs, I do not know if our services are still relevant. That's number one, considering the needs of our students so that we would be able to deliver it effectively."*
	• *Adapting to Emerging Trends*	• *"In the post pandemic scenario there's a rise talaga with cases po of self-injuries behavior. Because of our attendance to our organization we are able determine the severity of the case kung ito ba needing outside referral kung ito ba ay suicidal ito ba nasa low risk, moderate risk, or high risk."* *(……..whether the student needs an outside referral, whether the student is experiencing suicidal concerns, and whether the risk level is low, moderate, or high.)*

Table 2.

Continued.

Themes	*Sub-themes*	*Sample Statements*
RQ2/T3: *Professionalism in Practice*	● *Counselor Skill Development*	● *"Kaya nga po I kept on repeating about continuous upskilling and retooling of our personnel kasama na ako doon. Kasi naiiwanan tayo, the world is changing, and we have to do the updating or else we will be obsolete."* *(That is why I continuously emphasize the importance of ongoing upskilling and retooling among our personnel, myself included, because we may otherwise fall behind the changing demands of the profession….)*
	● *Counselor Personal Dispositions*	● *"Of course, you have to be psychologically and emotionally stable so you also need to be resilient, patient, and basically you should be able to really manage your own emotions. Aside from being resilient, being flexible also. Of course, managing your tasks here in school and attending to some personal things kasi from the pandemic."*
RQ2/T4: *Internal and External Network Influences*	● *Collaboration with External Organizations*	● *"We also provide a tool for the teachers, the utilization of the testing service so they are very much aware how they are going to make use of the test results on the guidance. …mas feeling ko na-catered na and mas identified na 'yong students with concerns because of the help of the teachers."*
	● *Family-School Engagement*	● *"…for our career guidance, we start our program in kinder until grade 12 so aside from the career seminars po, we also invite parents. I think, Sir, it is more of the parents who should be oriented."*
	● *Partnership with Teachers*	● *"We also provide a tool for the teachers, the utilization of the testing service so they are very much aware of how they are going to make use of the test results on the guidance. …mas feeling ko na-catered na and mas identified na 'yong students with concerns because of the help of the teachers."*

Table 2.

Continued.

Themes	*Sub-themes*	*Sample Statements*
RQ2/T5: *Program Scope and Operational Environment*	● *Strategic Support Programs*	● *"I believe, mas okay mas better 'yong pag-eevaluate po and pag-p'plano ng ating programs because of the challenges brought by the pandemic. Mas conscious, mas careful ang ating mga counselors and staff in terms of ano 'yong kinakailangang i-consider for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of our services."* *(I believe that the evaluation and planning of our programs are now better because of the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Our counselors and staff have become more aware and more careful about the factors that need to be considered in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of our services.)*
	● *Transformative Practices*	● *"I believe, mas okay mas better 'yong pag-eevaluate po and pag-p'plano ng ating programs because of the challenges brought by the pandemic. Mas conscious, mas careful ang ating mga counselors and staff in terms of ano 'yong kinakailangang i-consider for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of our services."* *(I believe that our program evaluation and planning are now better because of the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Counselors and staff have become more conscious and careful about what needs to be considered in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of our services.)*
	● *Sustained Strategies and Programs*	● *"Sa ngayon po kasi, with regard to the implementation of the services, wala naman po akong ma-ano, maliban lang po sa ma-continue po 'yoon."* *(For now, with regard to the implementation of our services, I do not have any particular concerns, except that we should continue what we are currently doing.)*

Table 2.

Continued.

Themes	*Sub-themes*	*Sample Statements*
RQ2/T6: *Assessment of Impact and Results*	● *Scope and Areas of Evaluation*	● *"We have to evaluate, and we have to do it consistently. So that we would be able din to implement the succeeding program for the following school year in a more effective way."*
	● *Evaluation and Monitoring Methods*	● *"Quantitatively. In terms sa dami ng walk-ins namin, Actually, isa rin 'yon sa mga barometer namin kung gaano kadami 'yong na-c'convince namin na, "p'wede kayong pumunta sa guidance office."* *(Quantitatively, in terms of the number of walk-in clients we receive, that is actually one of our barometers. It helps us determine how many students we have convinced that they can come to the guidance office whenever they need support.)*
RQ2/T7: *Change and Improvement Management*	● *School Consideration in Developing Guidance Program*	● *"Considering the evaluation, we look into the comments and suggestions, and kami din as a unit, we also during our monthly meeting as a unit and one of the items na tackled during the meeting is the evaluation of the activity, so that is the way we keep on improving."*
	● *Identified Gaps Perceived by Students*	● *"Adjustment concerns is one of the major problems raised during counselling sessions, from having online friends to meeting their classmates and friends face to face in the classroom."*

We integrated the themes from the document review and interview transcripts by identifying common patterns and recurring insights across the data. The results were classified into four evaluative themes for analysis and interpretation, namely, existing and relevant, existing but irrelevant, non-existing but relevant, and existing but requiring modification. The criteria used to evaluate the categories were developed based on recurring patterns identified during the coding process, the characteristics of the emergent

themes, and their relevance to guidance service delivery practices. These criteria guided the systematic classification and interpretation of the findings.

Table 3.

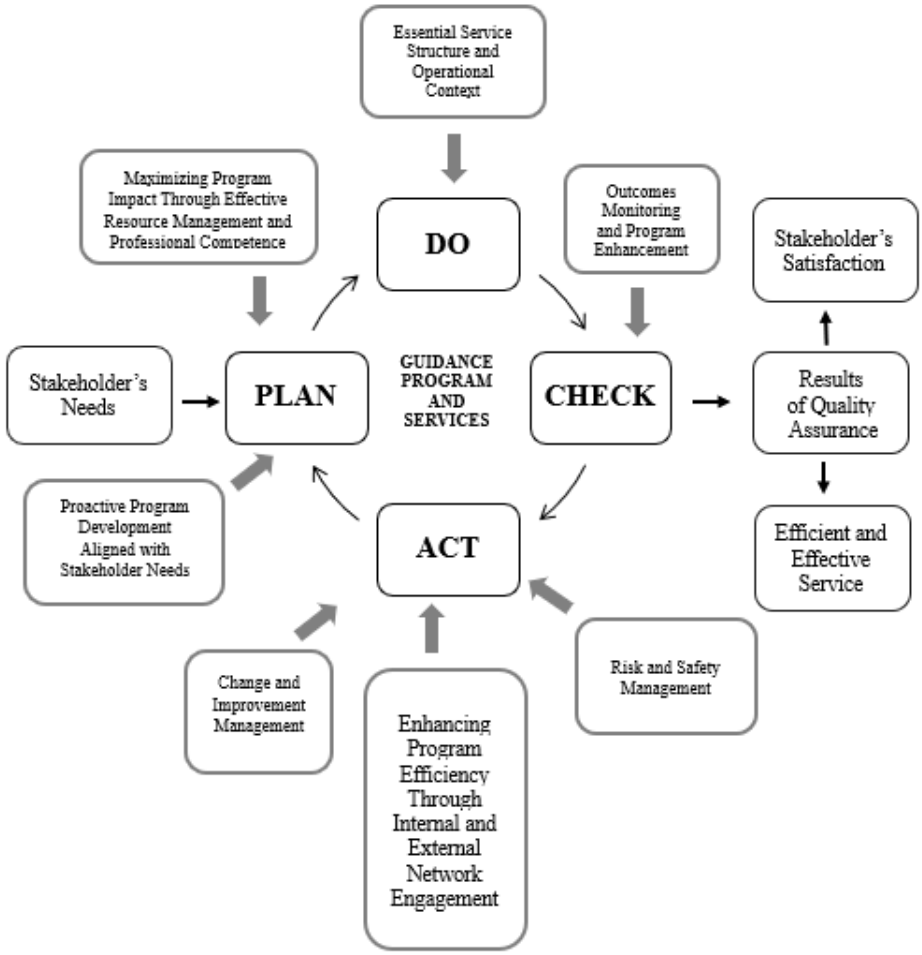
Categorization of Themes

Existing and Relevant	Existing but Irrelevant	Non-Existing but relevant	Existing but Needs Modifications
Theme 1*: Stakeholder-Centered Program*		***Theme 6****: Change and Improvement Management*	***Theme 2****: Resource Management for Optimal Program Impact*
Theme 4*: Essential Service Structure and Operations*		***Theme 7****: Data Protection and Privacy*	***Theme 3:*** *Efficiency Enhancement Through Collaborative Engagement*
Theme 5*: Outcomes Monitoring and Program Enhancement*			

The process as to how the themes were organized helped ensure that the common patterns identified in the data remained closely connected to the research findings. The findings of the study served as the basis of the QUALQUEST: Guidance Services Delivery Quality Assurance Framework. This proposed framework for quality assurance of guidance practice brings together the key quality standards established by PAASCU and the priorities highlighted by participants during the interviews. The name QUALQUEST reflects the framework's dual focus: the term “QUAL” emphasizes the commitment to quality in the planning, implementation, and continuous improvement of guidance programs. On the other hand, the term “QUEST” represents the ongoing pursuit of excellence and responsiveness to the changing needs of learners and schools.

Figure 2.

"QUALQUEST": Guidance Program Assurance Framework for Basic Education Schools



The resulting QUALQUEST framework consists of seven interrelated standards that collectively promote a sustainable, responsive, and quality-driven guidance program in the post-pandemic educational landscape. These standards emerged from the integration of the study's key findings and serve as the foundation of the proposed quality assurance framework for guidance service delivery.

Standard 1

Stakeholder-Centered Program *- underscores the influence of stakeholders in the design and development of guidance programs and services, ensuring that processes and initiatives are anchored to their needs and expectations.*

- *Conduct clear and systematic monitoring of stakeholder needs.*
- *Provide strategic programs that promote proactive adaptation to current and emerging student needs.*
- *Ensure that all stakeholders have equitable access to guidance programs and services.*
- *Existing guidance practices shall be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they remain relevant under varying conditions, especially with the current realities of the learners.*

Standard 2

Resource Management for Optimal Program Impact—*emphasizes that effective use of financial, material, and human resources is critical to the delivery of guidance programs and services.*

- *Ensure professional development activities by investing in guidance counselor training.*
- *Maintain regular and organized supervision practices in the implementation of guidance programs and services.*
- *Provide sufficient financial support to strengthen and sustain guidance programs and services.*
- *Undertake regular reviews of resources to ensure that they remain accessible, relevant, and equitable.*
- *Develop a mechanism for regularly assessing how resources are utilized to support the effectiveness of guidance programs.*

Standard 3

Efficiency Enhancement Through Collaborative Engagement *- upholds the necessity of network partnerships, both internal and external, in the planning and delivery of guidance programs and services*

- *Practice strong collaboration with internal and external resources across all areas of guidance programs and services to maximize program outcomes.*
- *Establish a clear structure of roles and responsibilities among internal and external networks in program planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement.*
- *Develop guidance processes that ensure the alignment of goals and objectives among internal and external networks.*

Standard 4

Essential Service Structure and Operations *- ensures the effective implementation of core guidance services by establishing a systematic and organized structure for service delivery and operations.*

- *Implement a well-defined structure for delivering core guidance services.*
- *Ensure a broad implementation of service structures and operations to promote institutional alignment and inclusivity.*
- *Build a strong organizational framework to enhance support and strengthen coordination across various departments in the school.*
- *Develop a system for evaluating the effectiveness of the guidance program and identify areas for program improvement.*
- *Implement standardized protocols and procedures to strengthen consistency in all guidance programs and services.*

Standard 5

Outcomes Monitoring and Program Enhancement *- promotes ongoing development and improvement of guidance practices to stay responsive to evolving realities of the stakeholders.*

- *Develop clear criteria and allocate adequate resources to support the regular monitoring of the outcomes and effectiveness of guidance services.*
- *Ensure the regular implementation of guidance program assessments and evaluations.*
- *Utilize program assessment findings to refine guidance programs and services.*

Standard 6

Change and Improvement Management*- promotes continuous enhancement, responsiveness to change, and active efforts to sustain quality service delivery.*

- *Implement a data-driven process to identify stakeholder demands, evolving trends in the guidance practice, and realities of the students.*
- *Develop a clear mechanism and innovative practices for collecting relevant information on guidance service delivery.*
- *Regularly assess and review guidance programs and services to assess their effectiveness and alignment with quality standards.*
- *Develop a responsive system and effective strategies to facilitate collaboration in the improvement process.*

Standard 7

Data Protection and Privacy *- encourages the strengthening of security measures in digital platforms to support the growing reliance on online services in the post-pandemic learning environment.*

- *Integrate privacy-related practices in the design and planning of digital guidance services.*
- *Establish strict confidentiality protocols in delivering online guidance services.*
- *Conduct regular assessments to identify emerging threats in online platforms.*
- *Maintain a periodic checkup of digital security policy and guidelines in online platforms used for the delivery of guidance services.*
- *Ensure the consistent implementation of established protocols in the delivery of online guidance services.*

This QUALQUEST framework serves as a guide for guidance practitioners in maintaining the quality and effectiveness of guidance services. This will also ensure that the services received by students remain responsive and relevant to their current realities. The QUALQUEST framework views student support programs like guidance services as planned and purposeful efforts designed to support students' personal, social, academic, and career development. Furthermore, the framework emphasizes accountability by ensuring that guidance programs continue to meet established standards.

Discussion

The research findings reveal important aspects of the development of guidance practices in Philippine basic education as schools transition to the realities brought about by the pandemic. The findings showed a consensus among participants that existing PAASCU standards on guidance practices remain a useful foundation for maintaining quality and effectiveness. However, the research participants also expressed concerns that some current standards require updating.

The post-pandemic environment has brought about significant changes in the way guidance services are provided. The changes in guidance practices that include wider use of digital tools, greater emphasis on data privacy, and demand for more effective program administration have also affected how guidance practitioners respond to students' needs. These recent

changes illustrate the need to reconsider and refine certain practice standards.

Participants further emphasized the need to revisit and update some existing standards so they reflect current school practices and emerging educational needs. The role of guidance practitioners has expanded as schools respond to the changing demands of blended and flexible learning environments. Also, the need for stronger collaboration with families and the community organizations have widened the scope of guidance services beyond what many of the existing standards originally anticipated. As counselors adapt to these changes, they are taking on new responsibilities that require more flexible approaches and updated standards for quality service delivery.

In addition, participants identified new areas of the guidance practice that reflect the changing demands of guidance services. In today's post-pandemic school environment, guidance practitioners have identified several areas of practice that have become essential to the delivery of services but are not sufficiently addressed in the current PAASCU standards. The findings emphasize the necessity for schools to adopt clear and responsive approaches to managing change. This will assist schools in being better prepared in managing transitions, addressing emerging challenges, and responding effectively to unexpected situations. The findings also emphasized the importance of strengthening data privacy and information security. The need to meet these expectations has become increasingly important because of the significant role that technology plays in the delivery of guidance services.

Accreditation standards continue to provide a valuable basis for maintaining the quality of guidance programs. However, the roles and responsibilities of guidance counselors have expanded, increasing the scope and complexity of their professional responsibilities. This highlights the need for a structured set of standards to guide future efforts in guidance practice and better respond to the current demands and emerging needs of stakeholders. Guidance counselors are expected to perform responsibilities that extend beyond traditional guidance services. Guidance counselors are expected to support students' socio-emotional well-being, use digital tools and online interventions effectively, build strong partnerships with stakeholders, and adapt programs to address the evolving needs of learners. These ever-changing circumstances point to the importance of a quality

assurance framework that is both responsive to current challenges and flexible enough to address future developments in guidance practice.

This study is intended to support, rather than replace, current quality assurance practices. The QUALQUEST framework focuses on narrowing the gap between existing accreditation standards and the day-to-day realities faced by Filipino guidance counselors in PAASCU-accredited basic education schools. While the current standards remain a valuable guide for quality practice, the way counseling services are delivered and experienced has changed significantly since the pandemic. Today, evolving educational policies, legal requirements, technological developments, and the lingering effects of the pandemic shape guidance services. Collectively, these developments have altered the way guidance practitioners support students and respond to their needs.

Both local and international literature have documented similar observations, which support the experiences shared by the participants. Wang et al. (2020) noted how the pandemic compelled schools to adopt alternative modes of service delivery while maintaining learner engagement and responding to significant disruptions in the educational process. More recent studies also underscore the growing need for counselors to develop competencies in digital and hybrid forms of counseling (Clemente-Suarez et al., 2024).

These findings reflect experiences that have likewise been documented in the Philippine educational setting. Participants noted an increase in student mental health concerns, greater reliance on online counseling services, and heavier administrative workloads for guidance counselors during and after the pandemic (Agoncillo, 2023; Tangco-Siason & Paulino, 2025). Moreover, Quilon and Kurniawan (2023) found that the online learning environment was a significant factor influencing the mental health of students, and the findings highlight the importance of creating supportive and conducive learning environments that promote students' mental health and academic engagement. Guidance counselors now perform a broader range of duties than they did before and have created new realities of practice that existing standards may not fully capture. Moreover, recently enacted laws in the country continue to emphasize the importance of regular monitoring, evaluation, and data-driven decisions to guide improvements in the guidance practice.

The findings reveal that despite the many efforts made to support students' academic, social, and emotional growth, the need to sustain program monitoring remains an ongoing challenge. The increasing use of technology has introduced new and complex realities that schools are required to navigate (Bergdahl & Nouri, 2021; Munir, 2022). Creating an environment where students can remain motivated and actively involved in learning and implementing more effective channels for feedback is necessary (Wang et al., 2020). The following development in the guidance profession underscores the need to demonstrate adaptability, develop technological proficiency, and offer services that remain flexible and relevant in a changing environment (Sato et al., 2024).

The changing landscape of students' needs warrants that guidance practitioners re-examine existing practices and identify responsive ways to ensure continuous student support (Ali, 2020). The effectiveness of any reform depends on its implementation and sustained efforts to monitor, evaluate, and improve outcomes over time. Regular assessment of programs and practices ensures that improvements address emerging needs and create lasting benefits for students and school communities (OECD, 2024).

The changing needs of students and the growing responsibilities of guidance counselors call for quality standards that remain relevant, responsive, and adaptable. Taken together, these policy developments, research findings, and post-pandemic realities emphasize the necessity of a quality assurance framework that reflects the evolving nature of guidance practice. The QUALQUEST framework was developed as a model for addressing current demands of the post-pandemic learning environment. This quality assurance framework brings together legal requirements, national quality standards, and the lived experiences of guidance counselors.

Conclusion

The needs and realities of students have evolved, bringing about new changes in how guidance services are delivered. Guidance programs are expected to offer flexible and responsive support that promotes their academic success and overall well-being. This study examined how highly PAASCU-accredited basic education schools maintain quality practices while meeting the demands of the stakeholders and the changing roles of the guidance profession. The findings suggest that clearer and more

responsive quality assurance approaches are necessary. As schools strengthen quality assurance activities, guidance practitioners must respond to emerging challenges, support effective service delivery using technology, protect sensitive personal information, foster collaboration among the stakeholders, and promote continuous program improvement. The QUALQUEST Guidance Services Delivery Quality Assurance Framework will serve as a guide to a unified standard that reflects local needs and conditions in managing guidance programs in schools. QUALQUEST offers an approach that unites existing accreditation standards and the current realities and experiences of guidance practitioners in the post-pandemic learning environment.

Recommendations

School leaders and administrators are encouraged to strengthen quality assurance practices in guidance services by providing sustained institutional support, adequate resources, and opportunities for the continuous professional development of guidance personnel. The integration of technology in service delivery, data management, and program evaluation should also be enhanced to promote efficiency, accessibility, and responsiveness to students' evolving needs. Furthermore, schools may strengthen collaborative mechanisms among guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and community partners to provide comprehensive support for learners.

Future research may further refine the proposed framework by involving a broader range of stakeholders and examining additional accreditation practices across public and private schools. Studies may also explore the influence of factors such as school size, socioeconomic conditions, resource availability, number of guidance counselors, leadership support, and learning modalities on the implementation of quality assurance initiatives. The use of multiple data sources, including surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, may better understand stakeholder experiences and strengthen future assessments.

Ultimately, guidance services can remain effective, accountable, and responsive when they are regularly reviewed, continuously improved, and supported by strong leadership and a school-wide commitment to quality.

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