PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS' COUNSELING SKILLS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHOOL CLIMATE

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Abstract:

The research highlights the teacher's important role in shaping a productive school climate that leads to students' social and personal development and to better learning achievements as well. In this effort, the teacher must possess and cultivate counseling skills such as empathy and acceptance. There is little research all over the world that presents the views of primary school students on teachers' counseling skills and their implementation in the classroom. A questionnaire survey was conducted on 168 primary school students in Greece. The results show that students acknowledge teachers' counseling skills being employed in the classroom leading to a flourishing school climate.

Keywords: teachers, counselling skills, students, primary school

1. Introduction

As in the broader social context, each and every one of us assumes certain social roles, so school as a social subsystem consists of natural people to whom defined roles are assigned (Merton, 1968).

The teacher promotes students, helping them develop those skills that will be useful for their integration and adaptation to society (Blake & Pope, 2008). The assistance offered by the teacher is called "support" or else it is metaphorically rendered with the term "scaffolding", thus defining the guidance provided to the students, in order for them to gradually internalize the new subject (Hoang, 2022· Margolis, 2020).

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The teachers' role has been evolving in recent years. She/He is expected to act as an agent of educational change (Fullan, 2006), because she/he, as a member of the Professional Leaning Community, implements the educational policy to be effective (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Research shows the relationship between instruction and students' learning outcomes (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021· Paniagua, & Istance, 2018). The discussion designates the need to strengthen the initial training as well as the in-service education of teachers in modern teaching and pedagogical suggestions (O.E.C.D., 2018).

The effectiveness of an education system is directly linked to the quality of its teachers (O.E.C.D., 2018). Across a majority of countries, as well as on a global scale, schools with more experienced teachers tended to demonstrate better outcomes in the P.I.S.A. test and a more positive school climate, as reported by the students (O.E.C.D., 2018).

A good school climate has positive effects not only on students (Stephanou & Kyridis, 2012· Virtanen et al., 2009) but on teachers as well (Payne, 2018). More specifically, substantial research emphasizes the significance of a positive school climate in promoting student development, forming direct associations with key success indicators such as academic achievement, graduation rates, effective risk prevention and teacher retention (Faster & Lopez, 2013). Educators working in a school characterized by a positive and collaborative atmosphere, seem to also demonstrate elevated levels of efficacy, morale and job satisfaction (Cohen & Geier, 2010· Thapa, 2012), as they work on shaping a collective school vision, fostering an ethos that promotes the advantages and fulfillment derived from the process of learning (Payne, 2018).

Research on students indicates that a school climate characterized by a pleasant working atmosphere, where groups are familiar with explicit rules and collaborate (Brion-Meisels et al., 2022), is marked by respect, acceptance, the effort to understand each other's perspectives and feelings (Ellis, Gage, Kramer, Baton, & Angelosante, 2022), sincerity (Keyes, 2019) and a sense of belonging (McMahon & Pileggi-Proud, 2022), will create better learning opportunities and academic outcomes. Undoubtedly, positive outcomes are likely to occur when fundamental psychological needs, such as the need for relatedness, autonomy and competence are fulfilled (Korpershoek, Canrinus, Fokkens-Bruinsma, & de Boer, 2020). Renewing the school climate emerges as a strategic initiative to boost student learning and achievement, strengthen the sense of school connectedness, diminish dropout rates, prevent bullying and other forms of violence, and improve teacher retention rates (Ciccone & Frieberg, 2013).

Studies show that while content knowledge is important, pedagogical knowledge is equally essential, indicating that students whose teachers demonstrated strong pedagogical expertise were more likely to gain a full year more learning than those under teachers with weak pedagogical knowledge (Meroni et al., 2015).

Skills and characteristics of teachers, that facilitate communication with students, among others, are self-awareness, cultural sensitivity and the ability to realistically assess what is possible in each context (McLeod & McLeod, 2020). The teacher must know the culture of her/his students, the knowledge of the impact that has been exerted on them

due to racism, poverty, etc. and the ability to recognize and use strategies to deal with racism and stereotypes (Saldaña, 2010). According to Green, McCollum & Hays (2008), professionals who provide counseling to culturally diverse individuals are not effective when they do not have the appropriate knowledge or understand how complex the issue of multiculturalism is.

Creating a school climate in which everyone can acquire knowledge is facilitated by the counseling skills of the teacher. Research highlights that effective teachers who prioritize building relationships and embody qualities such as trust, honesty, care and calmness significantly influence students' sense of support, belonging and engagement (Keyes, 2019), hence, the teacher's counseling role is intricately linked with establishing a positive climate (Gabrhelová & Pasternáková, 2016).

A noticeable research gap exists regarding students' perceptions of a positive school climate linked to the teachers' counseling skills in primary education. This study is essential to fill this void and provide valuable insights into the relationship between teacher counseling proficiency and the overall school atmosphere.

2. The school climate

The concept of school climate has been of international concern to many researchers and has been approached from multiple angles (Rustamov, Aliyeva, Rustamova & Zalova-Nuriyeva, 2023). According to McLellan and Nicholl (2008), school climate (or classroom climate) refers to the repetitive patterns of behavior, attitudes and emotions that characterize life within the school environment. Derived from the ecological paradigm, school climate incorporates elements of the physical environment, including the appearance, furnishing size and resources of the classroom, as well as considerations like heating and ventilation (Evans, Harvey, Buckley, & Yan, 2009). Nevertheless, the primary focus in most constructs of school climate remains the behavior of the teacher (Evans et al., 2010).

Therefore, the quality of a school's environment is molded by not only its physical features but also the merit of the relationship between the individual and learning – teaching process (Kalkan & Dagh, 2021). In the context of the school climate, standards, principals and anticipated outcomes can be included as they are aimed at making the individuals feel safe both emotionally and physically (The National School Climate Council, 2007).

However, despite the various names that exist in the international literature, what emerges is that, in general, the school climate reflects how children perceive and experience the basic characteristics of the school environment and teaching staff (Sink & Spencer, 2005), while at the same time, it is an important component for the effective and successful operation of the school (Koth, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2008).

Schools that are characterized by a positive climate feature students who are active participants in school life, taking a proactive role in their learning, with rules created through collective input from stakeholders and a reward system focused on positive

reinforcement rather than punishment (Bilgin, Yeşilyurt, & İnce, 2021). It is a fact that teachers have causal effects on students' behavior and feelings (Blazar, 2018). Research has shown that positive psychosocial climate at school affects students' health and well-being (Stephanou & Kyridis, 2012· Virtanen et al., 2009), especially when the school staff offers them opportunities for participation, and makes them feel trusted (Virtanen et al., 2009). On the other hand, a lack of obscured clarity regarding expectations for achievement and feedback can cause test anxiety (Stephanou & Kyridis, 2012).

To better comprehend the meaning of the school climate, it is essential to know the difference from the school culture. The culture represents the enduring structure of the school from the past, whereas the climate, being both psychological and short in duration as well as easily adaptable to current needs, is subject to change (Brion & Kiral, 2022).

Several researches are correlating the concepts of school culture, school climate and organizational culture with school effectiveness or advancements in diverse manners (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). In an overachieving school, the teachers collectively embrace shared values while the school culture fosters students' success and academic achievement (Özdemir, 2012), influencing motivation and contributing to the overall development of social and physical aspects (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021).

Positive teacher–student relationships seem to thrive in an atmosphere of closeness, warmth and positivity, offering a secure foundation for students to excel academically and socially, learn socially acceptable behaviors and meet academic expectations (Saeed & Akbar, 2021).

Inherently, people seek a sense of peace, comfort, happiness, care and appreciation in their everyday lives, and experiencing tranquility, safety and support in educational settings such as schools can have a positive impact on all human endeavors (Eren, 2019).

In this context, specific elements such as communal atmosphere, courtesy and politeness in personal relationships, and the perceptions of teachers and students regarding individual safety within the classroom, influence pedagogical relationships by fostering involvement in expressing ideas and opinions, as well as undertaking ambitious goals, free from apprehension and anxiety (Bardelli, Martinez, & Ruiz, 2023).

3. Teacher's counseling skills

Highlighting the growing importance of pedagogy in school administrations, it is vital to recognize that ensuring supportive factors for an effective pedagogical climate poses challenges, especially in centralized school management systems like the one in Greece, where the responsibility of maintaining a pedagogical environment in schools falls on education consultants, overseeing groups of schools sometimes in remote areas with limited transport access, such as mountainous and island regions (Alexopoulos, Babalis, Tsoli, & Delioridou, 2023).

The development of counseling skills, integral to education and training, requires a distinct level of mastery with experiential and hands-on learning being the most effective approach to cultivating these skills in preparation for broad applications in a

professional environment (Bonacquisti & McElwaine, 2020). While undertaking the task of providing assistance, it is imperative for the counselor in the school context to possess necessary skills, such as empathetic listening (Fitri, Mamesah, & Safitri, 2019).

She/He has to create a climate of empathy, respect, warmth and authenticity while using empowerment for the students' benefit (Saldaña, 2010). The concept of empathy is found a lot in the literature as one of the basic skills of counselors and professionals who undertake counseling tasks in their work. Brouzos (2004) defines empathy as the ability to "*perceive with such precision the internal frame of reference of a person, as if he is the other person, but without escaping the "as if" part*", while Rogers (1957) argued that empathy has a causal relationship with change and learning. According to Hill (2004), empathy is a more general and abstract concept, incorporating other counseling skills, such as listening, careful monitoring, clarification and coordination.

Though not serving as the school counselor, teachers frequently become the primary listeners and advisors for students facing issues related to normal development, spanning academic, personal and interpersonal challenges besides addressing individual problems, they also manage critical incidents by demonstrating empathy towards diverse challenges presented by students across various socioeconomic backgrounds, family structure, age and ability levels affecting the overall learning environment (Gouleta, 2006). Active listening is an important prerequisite for the activation of empathy, as in this way the teacher-counselor uses all her/his senses to understand what the student says or expresses nonverbally (Brouzos, 2004). It requires concentration, observation and synchronization with the student, as well as systematic practice and reflection (Hill, 2004). McLeod & McLeod (2020) report that during active listening, moments of pause and silence can reasonably be observed on the part of the counselor, especially in situations where she/he needs some time to process what has been said. It is also important that students are often given a period of pause or silence in order to organize their thinking and experience their feelings.

Reflection of emotions and paraphrasing are also important skills for the successful outcome of careful listening. Reflection is the teacher's ability to relay to hers/his student the meaning of what has been said from the second so far, thereby stating that she/he is watching her/him and confirming that what has been understood corresponds to reality (Brouzos, 2004). The use of paraphrasing also clarifies what has been said by the student, as it requires the teacher-counselor to accurately reflect the information given to her/him (Ivey, Gluckstern & Bradford-Ivey, 1992).

Insight, which is a high-level process, is the acquisition of an understanding of the origin and evolution of emotional difficulties, and follows the free expression of negative emotion, leading to the ability to control feelings and actions (Rogers, 1944). It consists, much like empathy, of individual skills, such as self-disclosure and reframing. Self-disclosure refers to the process of sharing personal aspects of oneself and personal experiences with the interlocutor. It is very important that the teacher, before self-disclosure, is careful about what she/he will share with the student. Disclosure should revolve around the support and assistance of the students without encouraging them to

try to help the teacher-counselor. At the same time, the ability to manage boundaries, among other things, serves in cases where the teacher does not know how and to what extent to proceed to self-disclosure (McLeod & McLeod, 2020).

These skills of teachers are among the most important they can possess in order to develop a facilitative, positive counseling relationship with their students. To develop them, one should practice their use as well as constantly receive feedback on their effectiveness. It is very useful for the teacher to know that the concept of each skill is multidimensional and for this reason thorough research is needed to understand their meaning and handling (McLeod & McLeod, 2020).

In conclusion, it is important to refer to the negative consequences that can result from the ineffective use of counseling skills. Heron (2001) developed a model of harmful uses of skills, citing unwanted use of skills, manipulative and unskilled interventions and obsessive-compulsive counselor behavior, as some errors of counselors/educators when trying to help.

Effective teachers are described as kind, caring, loving and interestingly "knowing", in a way that they are able to relate and deeply understand their students' likes, dislikes, basic information and special qualities (Robinson & Lewis, 2017). Additionally, educators with strong emotional and social skills are able to create strong interpersonal connections with their students based on encouragement and support as well as to effectively manage their classrooms (Gabrijelčič, Antolin, & Istenič, 2021). Ensuring an ideal learning atmosphere, where students feel at ease and a sense of community, is crucial for successful classroom instruction (Zainuddin & Hardiansyah, 2023).

The effectiveness of quality teachers extends to features such as expectations for students, self–belief, the ability to connect with students, and, consequently, student achievement (Meroni, Vera-Toscano, & Costa 2015). More specifically, according to research, effective teaching skills also include being respectful of students, as well as parents, demonstrating proficient communication abilities, possessing a warm demeanor and authentic concern for others, and collaborating as a member of a team (Tornee & Sanrattana, 2023).

Being a part of a team is of the outmost importance for both the students as well as the educators. In educational settings that are characterized by shared values, the teacher's influence is rooted in love and skills that endorse and support students instead of criticizing or passing judgement (Cosanay & Karali, 2022· Katsatasri, 2022), ultimately fostering individuals with self-confidence who conscientiously fulfill their responsibilities (Cosanay & Karali, 2022).

4. Material and Methods

The cross-sectional research design was chosen, which allows the collection of quantitative or quantifiable data at one point in time (Bryman, 2016, p.83). After the systematic review of the literature, the purpose of the research was set, followed by the

possible limitations, the choice of theory, the creation of research questions, the construction of the instrument, and the type of sampling. The final questionnaire consisted of thirty-five (35) multiple choice questions four-point Likert scale, starting from 1 = "Absolutely Disagree", to 4 = "Absolutely Agree".

Therefore, after reviewing the existing relevant literature (e.g. Brion-Meisels et al., 2022· Brouzos, 2004· Ciccone & Frieberg, 2013· Ellis et al., 2022· Gabrhelová & Pasternáková., 2016· Gouleta, 2006· Keyes, 2019· McMahon & Pileggi-Proud, 2022· Saeed & Akbar, 2021· Saldaña, 2010· Stephanou & Kyridis, 2012· Virtanen et al., 2009) and taking into consideration the researchers' experience in different positions within the Greek education system, two research questions were stated:

- Which are the primary school students' perceptions about teachers' counseling skills?
- Which are the primary school students' perceptions about the school climate in their classroom?

The data was collected in the period of May – June 2022 in the context of the thesis of the 1st author. A questionnaire was given hand by hand to the students in their classrooms. Random sampling was chosen, using the random number table of Kendall and Smith (1938). In the Municipality of Patras, a city in southwest Greece, operate (function) about 70 primary schools. 14 of them were selected, to which a letter was sent. Finally, 7 principals agreed to participate in the research.

The population of the research was the students in the 6th grade of the primary schools operating in the area of Municipality of Patras. Finally, 168 students answered the questionnaire, 85 boys, 81 girls and 2 did not respond. Regarding schools, 22% (n=37) attended schools A and G, 16.1% (n=27) schools E & F, 13.1% (n=22) school D, 6% (n=10) school B and 4.8% (n=8) school C. The minor number of students' answers in the questionnaires in some schools is because on the day the questionnaire was distributed, the students had not brought the parental consent signed.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter informing about the purpose of the research and the procedure, assuring anonymity and confidentiality, that there was no benefit for the researchers, that it was harmless to the participants and that they preserved their right to withdraw at any phase of the questionnaire completion process as well (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). The research complied with the code of conduct and ethics in all phases (Fontana & Frey, 1998· Miles & Huberman, 1994). To limit any errors and improve the image and the internal consistency of the questionnaire, a pilot distribution was carried out in April 2022 to a sample of 25 students.

The findings are presented in two research axes as discussed below. The first one, about students' perceptions about their teachers' counseling skills, consists of 23 items. The second one refers to students' perceptions about the school climate (12 items). A Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the questionnaire's reliability. It was found in the total a= .88 [in the first axe a = .82, while in the second was a = .79]. Thus, there is a high internal consistency (DeVellis, 1991).

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 24.0). Data was examined for skewness and kurtosis values to determine its normal distribution. As these values aren't between +1 and -1, and the values of median and mode aren't close to each other, the data were considered as not normally distributed. As the Kolmogorov-Smernov test is significant, the null hypothesis is rejected, thus the sample distribution can be considered as non-normal.

Kruskal-Wallis (H), Mann-Whitney (U) and Spearman's ρ, were used to compare the students' perceptions according to their school, father's, and mother's education. The level of significance (p) was set at 0.05, as is usually done when conducting social research.

5. Results

In this chapter, the results of processing the students' response data will be presented. Initially, their views on whether their teacher applies counseling skills in everyday teaching and if this role affects the pedagogical climate of the classroom will be presented. Then, the correlations between students' responses and their socio-demographic characteristics will be displayed.

5.1 Students' perceptions of teachers' counseling skills

Students were asked to rate a series of 23 statements related to the usage of counseling skills by their teacher. The mean, mode and cumulative relative frequency of responses 1 and 2 for disagreement with each statement (1+2) and the cumulative relative frequency of responses 3 and 4 for agreement with each statement (3+4) were calculated. The results are presented in the table below (Table 1).

Based on the below table, it is evident that students in general agree that their teachers use counseling skills in everyday teaching. More specifically, students, with Mode 4 = "Totally Agree," responded that the teacher: (a) *respects students* (X=3.46), (b) *accepts them* (X=3.43), (c) *listens carefully* (X=3.42), (d) *is glad when seeing the students happy* (X=3.24), (e) *makes students feel worthy and important* (X=3.22), (f) *tries to see things from students' point of view* (X=3.21), (g) *students can rely on her/him* (X=3.13), (h) *is interested in students* (X=3.11) and (i) *finds solutions to problems students face* (X=3.05) and (j) *whenever students feel confused, the teacher helps them to calm down* (X=2.91). Furthermore, students with Mode 3 = "Agree" mentioned that their teacher: (a) *is honest and true,* (X=3.50), (b) *makes them feel they're doing important things* (X=3.04), (c) *is proud of her/his students,* (X=2.96), (d) *makes them feel confident* (X=2.95) (e) *understands if something concerns students* (X=2.91) and (f) *doesn't ask them to change when they feel strong emotions* (X=2.68). Moreover, students with Mode 2 = "Disagree" stated that (a) *their teacher makes them feel comfortable discussing a problem they face with her/him* (X=2.52) and (b) *can express their feelings to her/him* (X=2.39). Finally, students with Mode 2 "Totally disagree" answered that their teacher (a) *judges them for everything they do* (X=1.74), (b) *deals with the students only for school lessons*

(X̄=1.71), (c) *is too busy to engage with their problems* (X̄=1.70), (d) *makes them feel insecure* (X̄=1.60) and (e) *ignores them when they ask for her/his help* (X̄=1.28).

Table 1: Students' perceptions about teacher's counseling skills

Students' perceptions	Mean	Mode	1+2 (%)	3+4 (%)
The teacher respects students.	3.46	4	11.9	78.1
The teacher accepts students.	3.43	4	14.9	75.1
The teacher listens carefully.	3.42	4	10.7	89.3
The teacher is glad when sees the students happy.	3.24	4	17.3	82.7
The teacher makes students feel worthy and important.	3.22	4	18.5	82.5
The teacher tries to see things from the students' point of view.	3.21	4	19.6	79.4
Students can rely on their teacher.	3.13	4	24.4	75.6
The teacher is interested in students.	3.11	4	24.4	75.6
The teacher finds solutions to the problems students face.	3.05	4	27.4	72.6
The teacher helps students to calm down whenever they feel confused.	2.91	4	34.5	64.5
The teacher is honest and true.	3.50	3	8.9	91.1
The teacher makes students feel they're doing important things.	3.04	3	26.8	73.2
The teacher is proud of her/his students.	2.96	3	23.8	76.2
The teacher makes students feel confident.	2.95	3	29.8	70.2
The teacher understands if something concerns students.	2.91	3	31.5	68.5
The teacher doesn't ask students to change.	2.68	3	42.3	57.7
The teacher makes students feel comfortable discussing a problem they face.	2.52	2	53	47
The students can express their feelings to their teacher	2.39	2	58.9	41.2
The teacher judges students for everything they do.	1.74	1	80.4	19.6
The teacher deals with the students only for school lessons.	1.71	1	82.7	17.3
The teacher is too busy to engage with students' problems.	1.70	1	84.5	15.5
The teacher makes students feel insecure.	1.60	1	84.5	14.5
The teacher ignores students when they ask for her/his help.	1.28	1	91.7	8.3

5.2 Students' perceptions of pedagogical climate in the classroom

Furthermore, students were asked to respond to a series of 12 statements regarding the effect of teachers' usage of counseling skills on the pedagogical climate in their classroom.

The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' perceptions of pedagogical climate

Students' perceptions	Mean	Mode	1+2 (%)	3+4 (%)
Knowledge of the existence of the rules.	3.68	4	5.4	94.6
Classroom rules apply to everyone.	3.38	4	17.3	82.7
The teacher seems annoyed by the student's unfair treatment.	3.29	4	17.9	82.1
The teacher is objective with all the students.	3.24	4	17.3	82.7
Students have a sense of belonging.	3.22	4	18.5	81.5
When there is a need, the teacher gives time not to stress the students.	3.16	4	24.4	74.6
The teacher suggests that students work as a team.	3.12	4	22	78
The teacher always says "well done" for the effort.	3.08	4	29.2	70.8
The students feel that they're different but equal.	3.05	4	28.6	71.4
The teacher and the students find solutions, discussing them together.	2.80	4	35.7	63.3
There is a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom.	2.86	3	34.5	64.5
When a student answers wrong, their classmates will make fun of her/him.	2.05	1	70.8	29.2

According to the above table, it is apparent that students generally agree that the teacher's counseling skills affect the pedagogical climate of the class.

More specifically, students with Mode 4 = "Totally agree" responded that: (a) *they know the reasons for the existence of rules* (X̄=3.68), (b) *classroom rules apply to everyone* (X̄=3.38), (c) *the teacher seems annoyed to an unfair treat of a student* (X̄=3.29), (d) *teacher is objective with all the students* (X̄=3.24), (e) *students have a sense of belonging* (X̄=3.12), (f) *when a student needs time, the teacher gives tome so as not to stress her/him* (X̄=3.16), (g) *the teacher suggests that students work as a team* (X̄=3.12), (h) *the teacher says always "well done" for the effort they make* (X̄=3.08), (i) *the students feel that they're different but equal* (X̄=3.05), and (j) *students and teacher find solutions to various issues arise by discussing together* (X̄=2.80).

Moreover, students with Mode 3 = "Agree" stated that *the atmosphere in the classroom is pleasant so as everyone wants to participate* (X̄=2.86). Finally, students with Mode 1 = "Totally disagree" stated that *when they give a false answer, they're afraid that their classmates will make fun of them* (X̄=2.05)

5.3 Students' perceptions regarding their sociodemographic characteristics

Students' responses were correlated with their sociodemographic characteristics (father's and mother's level of education and the school they attend).

As it turns out (Table 4), students whose father's education is the lowest (Gymnasium) gathered the highest rating, that is they disagreed most of all in the statement "*The teacher deals with us only for school lessons*" [SO=75), x²(3) =14.378, p=.002], while the students whose father's education is a bachelor degree disagreed most of all in

the statement "*Classroom rules apply to everyone, not just those the teacher doesn't seem to like*" [SO=70.68), $x^2(3)$ =8.136, p=.043].

Table 4: Students' perceptions about the effect of teacher's usage of counseling skills for the pedagogical climate of the classroom based on their father's education

Item	Father's education	N	Mean rank	Chi-square	df	p
The teacher deals with us only for school lessons.	Gymnasium	9	75.00	14.378	3	.002
	Lyceum	36	74.01			
	Bachelor	43	47.87			
	Post-graduate studies	37	66.95			
Classroom rules apply to everyone, not just those the teacher doesn't seem to like.	Gymnasium	9	40.28	8.136	3	.043
	Lyceum	36	65.78			
	Bachelor	43	70.68			
	Post-graduate studies	37	58.39			

Table 5: Students' perceptions about the effect of teacher's usage of counseling skills for the pedagogical climate of the classroom based on their mother's education

Item	Mother's education	N	Mean rank	Chi-square	df	p
The teacher deals with us only for school lessons.	Gymnasium	12	76.17	9.480	3	.024
	Lyceum	30	66.32			
	Bachelor	42	49.85			
	Post-graduate studies	39	67.41			

Moreover, students whose mother's education is the lowest (Gymnasium) gathered the highest rating, that is they disagreed most of all in the statement "*The teacher deals with us only for school lessons*" [SO=76.17), $x^2(3)$ =9.480, p=.024] (Table 5).

Regarding the school students attend, as it turns out, the students who attend school G, gathered the highest rating, that is they agreed most of all with the statements "*The teacher listens carefully*" [SO=98.04), $x^2(6)$ =15.577, p=.024], and "*When there is a need, the teacher gives time not to stress the students*" [SO=104.04), $x^2(6)$ =17.381, p=.008]. On the other hand, the students who attend school E, agreed most of all with the statements "*The teacher understands if something concerns students*" [SO=127,81), $x^2(6)$ =19.730, p=.003], and "*The teacher tries to see things from students' point of view*" [SO=105.56), $x^2(6)$ =15.196, p=.019]. Finally, the students who attend school C agreed most with the statement "*The teacher suggests that students work as a team*" [SO=104.78), $x^2(6)$ =13.518, p=.036] (Table 6).

Table 6: Students' perceptions about the effect of teacher's usage of counseling skills for the pedagogical climate of the classroom based on the school they attend

Item	School	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	p
The teacher listens carefully.	School A	37	85.15	14.577	6	.024
	School B	10	76.30			
	School C	8	89.13			
	School D	22	58.41			
	School E	27	95.24			
	School F	27	77.24			
	School G	37	98.04			
The teacher understands if something concerns students.	School A	37	65.64	19.730	6	.003
	School B	10	74.10			
	School C	8	127.81			
	School D	22	69.17			
	School E	27	91.19			
	School F	27	89.94			
	School G	17	97.14			
The teacher tries to see things from students' point of view.	School A	37	67.76	15.196	6	.019
	School B	10	75.35			
	School C	8	105.56			
	School D	22	67.75			
	School E	27	95.46			
	School F	27	90.06			
	School G	37	97.07			
The teacher suggests that students work as a team.	School A	37	79.19	13.518	6	.036
	School B	10	59.65			
	School C	8	90.63			
	School D	22	66.45			
	School E	27	104.78			
	School F	27	93.78			
	School G	37	84.36			
The teacher gives time not to stress the students.	School A	37	73.69	17.381	6	.008
	School B	8	73.90			
	School C	22	74.50			
	School D	27	86.45			
	School E	27	96.69			
	School F	37	63.52			
	School G	8	104.04			

The 3 schools mentioned above are located in socially favored areas of the city. Most of the students who attended these schools come from upper socioeconomic categories. The non-parametric Spearman correlation analysis ρ applied afterward revealed statistically significant positive correlations in all 5 statements (0.27 - 0.59). (Table 7).

Table 7: Correlations (Teacher's role)

			Teacher's role				
			The teacher listens carefully.	The teacher understands if something concerns students.	The teacher tries to see things from students' point of view.	The teacher suggests that students work as a team.	The teacher gives time not to stress the students.
Teacher's role	The teacher listens carefully.	Correlation Coefficient	1	.520**	.307**	.387**.	359**
	The teacher understands if something concerns students.	Correlation Coefficient	.520**	1	.292**	.309**	.304**
	The teacher tries to see things from the students' point of view.	Correlation Coefficient	.307**	.292**	1	.274**	.334**
	The teacher suggests that students work as a team.	Correlation Coefficient	.387**.	.309**	.274**	1	.260**
	The teacher gives time not to stress the students.	Correlation Coefficient	359**	.304**	.334**	.260**	1

6. Discussion

The first research question addressed the incorporation of counseling skills by educators, focusing on aspects such as communication, honesty, unconditional acceptance, genuineness, active listening and care. The research findings suggest that teachers, nowadays, integrate the counseling role into their broader responsibilities to a satisfactory extent, as perceived by their students. This can be attributed to the fact that a large part of contemporary teachers has to address student challenges, demonstrating empathy and fostering a supportive learning environment (Gouleta, 2010).

Based on the results, it is evident that teachers are recognized for qualities such as listening to the students, respecting, and accepting them, making them feel important and worthy, as well as being reliable, showing interest, being helpful, calm, and honest towards them. The existing research supports the importance of teachers' counseling skills, particularly emphasizing the importance of empathetic and active listening, as highlighted by Fitri et al. (2019) and McLeod & McLeod (2020). Furthermore, it stresses the importance of cultivating an atmosphere free of judgement (Cosanay & Karali, 2022· Katsatasri, 2022) and based on amiable interactions, a point accentuated by Tornee & Sanrattana (2023). That also aligns with the findings of Robinson & Lewis (2017) who talk about the essential qualities of kindness, care and understanding that teachers should possess. Collectively, these insights bring into light the most important and effective

counseling skills encompassing warm interpersonal relationships and non-judgmental attitudes, all contributing to a positive and supporting learning environment.

The second research question addressed the impact of teachers' counseling skills on the pedagogical climate of the class. Sink & Spencer (2005) note that the school climate reflects the way students perceive the school environment and teaching staff while emphasizing the crucial role it holds in the effective operation of schools (Koth et al., 2008). The results presented underlined various positive aspects contributed by the teacher's counseling skills to the overall climate, including understanding the reasons behind the existence of class rules and the fair application of them. As findings from the National School Climate Council (2007) present, established standards and principles play a crucial role in ensuring the emotional and physical safety of students. Students also mentioned teachers' objectivity, encouragement and promoting of teamwork, the sense of belonging and equality, as qualities forming a positive school climate. The existence of a pleasant classroom atmosphere where everyone wants to participate is another quality mentioned but, nonetheless, there were some expressed concerns about potential mockery from classmates in case a student gave incorrect answers in class. The associated research underscores the influence of a positive school climate on students' well-being and psychosocial development (Stephanou & Kyridis, 2012· Virtanen et al., 2009). According to Bardelli et al. (2023) elements such as a communal atmosphere along with being safe within classrooms, are a substantial influence on pedagogical relationships, and actively encourage student involvement in the classroom, fostering an anxiety-free environment.

It is also worth mentioning that data suggests that students with parents holding lower education levels strongly refute the idea of being consulted by their teachers exclusively for academic matters. This indicates a sentiment of fairness in the classroom since it challenges stereotypical assumptions that students from families with lower educational backgrounds are being treated differently.

Moreover, there are significant differences in students' opinions regarding the school they attend for their teacher's counseling skills and their implementation in the classroom for the evaluation of a flourishing school climate. These schools are located in areas of the city where most of the residents belong to the upper social categories.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate primary school students' perceptions regarding their teachers' counseling skills and the school climate in their classrooms. The findings, consistent with existing research, emphasize that teachers employ counseling skills in their everyday practice, highlighting respect, acceptance, attentive listening and understanding as the most important ones. Moreover, a consensus among students indicates that those specific skills contribute to a positive school climate where a sense of belonging is fostered, rules are known and applied, and an inclusive and supportive

learning environment is formed, dispelling the notion of differential treatment based on family educational backgrounds.

8. Recommendations

Future studies could examine students' opinions regarding their gender, the socioeconomic status of their families, and the teacher's professional and personal characteristics as well.

9. Limitations

The restricted area where the research was performed constitutes a limitation of the study. Nevertheless, the results don't lose their value.

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Notes
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Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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