



Counselor-Perceived Teacher Actions Needed to Carry out Educational and Vocational Guidance in Secondary Schools in Spain

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After analyzing the scientific literature referring to guiding actions developed in secondary education, there is an appreciable lack of research on process efficiency performed by teachers. This study explores the practice of tutoring, which in Spain is coordinated by counselors but the responsibility of teachers. An *ad hoc* semistructured questionnaire was designed, validated and applied within the framework of a collaboration agreement between professional institutions of counselors and researchers. The questionnaire was answered by 102 counselors who are heads of guidance departments because the insight of counseling experts was desired. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses indicated correlations between the profile of the counselors and the performance of tutoring, described the content and predominant intervention models and identified needs for improvement. A much more intensive and direct intervention by counselors is necessary in a system in which teachers are not trained enough and time dedicated to tutorial action is deficient. Notably, counselors coordinate and supervise tutoring, but they feel overwhelmed by the lack of concrete norms and their workload.

Keywords: school counselor, school tutoring, vocational guidance, secondary education, qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Co-ordinated tutoring is one of the most outstanding functions of teachers. Thus, it constitutes a fundamental support of teaching action from the point of view of professional self-efficacy, teacher-student relations and a positive school culture (OECD, 2009). The purpose of this study is to determine, in an exploratory sense, how tutoring in compulsory secondary education is developed from the perspective of counselors. The research is qualitative, conducted in Spain and involves counselors from almost the entire national territory. The starting point is a set of research questions (RQ) that define the research problem and guide the investigative process: RQ1) Are there relationships between counselor characteristics and tutoring practices? RQ2) What tutoring models predominate in relation to content, processes and work strategies? RQ3) What are the needs of the teachers as tutors?

Guidance and tutorial action are topics pending reflection, research, reevaluation and updating to improve practices. Currently, these activities are incorporated into secondary education as a model of school integration in almost all European countries, although the pace of implementation varies (Hearne and Neary, 2021). Especially relevant is the integration of vocational guidance at this stage from a comprehensive perspective, and yet, it continues to be considered an excessively politicized

process (Sultana, 2014). Tutorial action is a first-level guidance intervention, carried out by teachers under the coordination of school counselors. Tutoring is offered to students and their families. It is mainly performed by a teacher-tutor but involves all teachers. To improve tutoring processes, it is necessary to start with a contextualized needs analysis and European strategic recommendations on life-long guidance (González-Benito and Vélaz de Medrano, 2014; European Commission, 2020).

Counselors, as those responsible for and the coordinators of tutorial actions, demand the clarification of and improvements in tutoring functions, competencies, strategies and organizational structures. Over the years, not only has the educational scenario change substantially, but research has continually contributed new theoretical and strategic points of view on guidance (Haug and Plant, 2016; Perry and Shannon, 2017). Priorities in vocational guidance, inclusive education and assessment procedures, among others, are evolving (ETF, 2020; Council of the European Union, 2021). However, it is not known whether this theoretical-strategic progress is transforming the efficacy of teachers in their role as tutors in the Spanish context.

The main beneficiaries of counseling, that is, adolescents, have specific needs that go beyond what is related to their professional career. They need to feel that they belong to a safe context, that they have opportunities and new challenges and that they do not see their leisure options limited and feel they can overcome cultural and socioeconomic prejudices (Aguar and Conceição, 2015). In addition, the need for guidance within the school environment is increased in students with low academic performance, less parental support and low family income (Park et al., 2018). A change in focus is urgently needed for vocational guidance: from counseling individuals regarding important decisions to helping them develop skills to understand and make decisions autonomously and with resilience. This new paradigm guarantees positive youth development, proactivity, self-determination, entrepreneurship, self-efficacy and motivation (Andrei and Solberg, 2019). In fact, being career ready requires acquiring employability skills associated with one's career goals (Castellano, Richardson, Sundell and Stone III, 2017).

TUTORIAL ACTION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

During the second half of the last century, secondary education emerged linked to higher education. The preparatory purpose of this stage and its structure in cycles, modalities or elective pathways condition the functions of teachers. The criticisms of the poor pedagogical training of teachers in inclusion, equity and sustainability have a long history and continue today (Lorenzo et al., 2015; Silva et al., 2017). How teachers are trained has drawn much controversy and has been complicated by broad international heterogeneity regarding theoretical meaningfulness and practical organization. The most substantial difference refers to the moment of teacher selection, which can be before, during or after acquiring training (Ries et al., 2016), which determines the

importance given to psychopedagogical knowledge as a basis or as a complement.

Some studies seek to understand how tutoring is valued, in terms of its meaningfulness and importance, by the main protagonists: tutors and students. These studies aim to determine the time dedicated to guidance and the difficulties encountered by tutors when tutoring. In general, there is widespread agreement on the importance of tutoring for the proper functioning of schools and for the quality of teaching. Moreover, the job satisfaction and the teachers' belief in their own effectiveness are fairly similar across countries (OECD, 2009). The most common problems are the lack of motivation of some teachers who do not want to be tutors because of the responsibility entailed, a lack of recognition by teachers and insufficient time allocated for tutorial work (López, 2013). Additionally, the gap between the relevance that students attach to vocational guidance during high school and the low satisfaction with the work done by their tutors and school counselors is substantial (Rodríguez et al., 2018). On the other hand, professional counselors state that adolescents who develop and participate in personal and teacher-led projects acquire transversal skills that improve their level of employability (Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Vélaz-de-Medrano et al. (2018) evaluate the performance of tutorial action based on data provided by tutors. The authors use an *ad hoc* methodology to determine the level of tutoring performance based on tutor perceptions. The study has a large sample of compulsory secondary education teachers in the Valencian Community (Spain). The perception of the tutors reveals a mismatch between the real and ideal dedication to personalizing teaching to achieve the maximum comprehensive development of the students. The study notes various causes that are related in a circular, nonlinear way: high levels of self-demand, insufficient training, lack of time and complex contexts. Teachers see themselves as more entrepreneurial, collaborative and proactive in relation to their own professional development when they formulate learning goals for themselves and the culture promotes transformational leadership for teacher learning (Louws et al., 2017). However, several demographic variables have had varying degrees of influence on teachers' occupational interests in secondary schools. Teachers differed significantly in their realistic, investigative, artistic, enterprising and occupational interests on the basis of gender and rank (Oyifioda and Iornenge, 2020).

In relation to family engagement, participation models are more complex in secondary school than in previous stages, increasing diversity among school contexts. The relationship between family participation and variables such as school climate, context and academic performance also increases. Improving the relationships between counselors, guardians and families is associated with having received training in skills to provide services to families and expand parents' expectations about counseling (Castro et al., 2015; Vaishnavi and Kumar, 2018).

Several studies report the prevalence of a more academic needs-focused guidance model rather than personal and interpersonal development. Students perceive that the work of

a counselor is aimed at enabling them to face challenges that may appear throughout their academic journey. The view of the counselor as a school psychologist is maintained in many institutions, where they provide personal and emotional adjustment and are only sought for advice to resolve conflicts and obtain help (Amor and Serrano, 2020; Auger et al., 2018; Carey et al., 2018). Many teachers also perceive counselors this way in educational institutions, demonstrating that much remains to be done regarding the review, definition and clarification of the functions and competencies of counselors (Johnson et al., 2010). When tutoring is analyzed from the perspective of counselors, it is observed that they dedicate a large part of their time to carrying out tasks related to the collection, synthesis, transformation and dissemination of resources to teachers. Counselors define themselves as sources of information and knowledge but also as disseminators of ideas, curriculum materials and research findings. They perform professional consulting functions that facilitate access to the appropriate tools for teachers to work autonomously and efficiently. However, in addition, they believe that there are high demands on them regarding activities outside the scope of their responsibilities and that spending time on these activities has a negative impact on their efficiency as counselors (Benigno, 2017; Hernández and Mederos, 2018). A survey of school counselors analyzed self-efficacy with school climate, counselor roles, and a variety of demographic variables. Results indicated that outcome expectancy for counselor behavior was predicted by a high degree of support from school staff and administrators and fewer nonrelated counseling activities performed by school counselors (Sutton and Fall, 1995).

With regard to guidance in secondary education, professional counseling deserves special attention. Currently, it is conceptualized, at least in the theoretical field, with a proactive, procedural, mediating and accompanying character in all academic stages. It is also necessary to include education in work values from a reflective and non-determining perspective. It is about preventing vocational changes and the abandonment of university careers (Cano, Orejudo and Cortés, 2019). Stable and lasting positive effects have been found in interventions that introduce professional counseling with group and individual activities into school hours (Andrei and Solberg, 2019; Babarović et al., 2020). However, more varied technical resources are needed, such as interviews, talks, meetings with families, intervention programs with TIC resources and with other conventional materials (Rodríguez et al., 2018; Costa et al., 2020).

Some current international experiences show the benefits of integrating guidance in teaching and the curriculum from an early age. In an educational institution in Wisconsin, an evaluative investigation of a program that integrates guidance beginning in elementary school was developed. It is a community plan aimed at working individually on academic, personal, social and career development. The results are very positive and contribute activities and resources to the international counseling community. Among its conclusions is the importance of cooperation between all teachers and counselors as well as the importance of training and the inclusion of teachers

and families throughout the process (Boland et al., 2019). Another example is a publication by Sultana R, (2018) that represents a complete framework for career guidance in middle and high schools. It provides six fields of action for the development and improvement of school counseling services, with recommendations and resources for teachers and those responsible for education. As a transversal axis, reflective practice is emphasized to ensure quality in any guidance program.

When all teachers are involved in counseling, the principles of development and prevention are met, but specific training and time are needed to achieve this. It is essential to integrate educational programs with the curriculum, under the coordination of counselors, to ensure the evaluation and acquisition of life skills (Chan et al., 2011; Jariot, 2010). The training of secondary school teachers must include greater pedagogical and counseling knowledge instead of focusing almost exclusively on the didactics of a subject. The change in approach is needed from which the role and basic functions of teachers are contemplated, as well as the integration of content, content pedagogy and pedagogical knowledge (Imbernón, 2019; Neumann et al., 2019).

As seen in the theoretical framework, both the content and the model of action from which tutoring is addressed are in full practical and investigative development. To this reality is added the diversity of contexts that characterize secondary education in our country. In this study, three specific research objectives are proposed: (a) carry out an exploratory analysis of the guidance action developed by secondary education teachers in Spain in relation to the current theoretical framework; (b) describe the types of actions, strategies and instruments most used by teachers when tutoring, as well as emerging needs; and (c) analyze the relationship between the vision of guidance based on counselors, teachers and educational policy.

METHODS

The design places the counselor as the center of the study to serve a dual purpose: first, to obtain the professional perspective of counselors regarding tutorial actions, as they direct and coordinate tutorial action as guidance specialists; and second, to complete the existing research framework on tutorial action from other perspectives: teachers, students and families. An exploratory and descriptive study is conducted using an *ad hoc* questionnaire aimed at counselors who are heads of the guidance department of secondary schools. The educational context is the stage that includes students between 12 and 16 years of age; this context serves as compulsory education and is preparatory to the labor market and postcompulsory training.

The study began when the researchers requested professional support from two reference entities in counseling in our country: the local Asociación Aragonesa de Psicopedagogía (AAPS) (Aragonese Association of Psychopedagogy) and the national Confederación de Organizaciones de Psicopedagogía y Orientación de España (COPOE) (Confederation of Organizations of Psychopedagogy and Counseling of Spain). A

collaboration agreement was signed between the research team of the university and these organizations. As a result of this relationship, research was developed, responding to common interests, goals and intervention routes, and the questionnaire was validated and distributed throughout Spain.

Sample

The respondents were 102 secondary education counselors in Spain (65 women and 37 men). Seventy-six percent currently exercise their professional functions as heads of guidance departments; twenty percent have held this position in the last 5 years, and the remaining 6% did so previously. Forty-six percent of the sample had more than 21 years of experience in counseling. The questionnaire was disseminated through the Spanish Psychopedagogy Association network; therefore, there were participants from 13 autonomous communities. Of the counselors, 88% work in a public institution, 12% in a subsidized institution and 2% in a private institution. The response to the questionnaire was voluntary with selfless collaboration. The professional experience of the informants and their representativeness of the group of secondary school counselors in the national territory in various types of educational centers was evident.

Instrument

An *ad hoc* questionnaire was developed that specifically addressed the purposes of this research. First, a deconstructive reflection was generated based on the guidance actions that correspond to teachers, in relation to the three specific objectives, obtaining several investigative nuclei. These nuclei of interest are: a) tutoring content, b) the types of actions aimed at students and families, c) the sources and instruments to obtain information, d) the effectiveness of the processes (evaluation, resources, training and regulations), and e) detecting needs.

After the preliminary design of the questionnaire by the research team, it was subjected to evaluation by guidance experts from various fields who were intentionally selected. Some of them performed the review and provided contributions individually through email. The others participated in a focus group in which the nuclei of interest and the items on the instrument were discussed. The group of experts comprised 12 professionals: 3 professors from the University of Saragossa with a research career in counseling and 9 secondary education counselors. Of the latter, 5 worked in the public institutions, 2 in subsidized schools and 2 in private nonsubsidized institutions. A semi-structured panel of experts was carried out with several phases: I) Training session on the objectives of the research. II) Presentation of the preliminary questionnaire with the items associated with the nuclei of interest. III) Dynamics of participation and discussion on the validity of the items, their content, writing and organization within the questionnaire.

After the evaluation of the questionnaire by the experts, the final version was constructed by the research group and submitted to a final review by the presidents of the collaborating entities (AAPS and COPOE). The complete process of construction and validation of the questionnaire

was carried out between April and June 2019. The collaborators disseminated the instrument for data collection through an online form between October 2019 and February 2020.

The questionnaire is semistructured and consists of two parts. The first collects demographic and professional data of the participants. The second contains 13 statements that include 49 items with different response formats. There are closed-ended choice items that condition a response (polytomous and dichotomous), other items that collect frequency data, graduated rating scales and, finally, open-ended questions.

The validity of the instrument is based on triangulation as the most supported reliability strategy in qualitative methodology. The contributions of the theoretical framework, the observations of the experts and the methodological combination that integrates quantitative and qualitative data in the study of the same object have been contrasted (Flick, 2009; Aguilar and Barroso, 2015).

Data Analysis

Taking into account the diversity of response types to the questionnaire items, several types of analysis were performed. Regarding the first research question (Are there relationships between counselor characteristics and tutoring practices?) quantitative analysis, without predetermined hypotheses and of an exploratory nature, was used to reveal emerging links between participant data and tutorial actions. This analysis was performed using the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0. In relation to the second research question (What tutoring models predominate in relation to content, processes and work strategies?) a frequency analysis was carried out that provided percentages and facilitated the comparison between the categories proposed for each item. Third, the last research question (What are the needs of the teachers as tutors?) was answered by analyzing the data provided in the open-ended questions. According to the nature of the responses with narrative data, the qualitative analysis was analytical and inductive by taking Grounded Theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) as method. Therefore, work began by using the key themes supported by the experts in the questionnaire validation -skills requirements, resources, evaluation, commitment, support and acknowledgement-. Then, possible connections among the emerging categories were explored until a two-level coding. The generated map was verified in a last round of data review; and categories were constantly refitted. The entire process was developed and revised by research authors.

RESULTS

In relation to RQ1, a first correlation analysis (**Table 1**) yielded data that link certain descriptive aspects of the counseling profile with the transversal topics addressed by the tutor. The gender of the counselor is related to issues such as nutrition and sports ($\rho = 0.198$; $p < 0.05$). Another relevant aspect in the counseling function, experience, is inversely associated with addiction prevention intervention ($\rho = -0.200$; $p < 0.05$). There is a

TABLE 1 | Spearman ρ (rho) Correlations between Counselor Profile and the Transversal Content Addressed by Tutors.

	Age	Gender	Experience	Degree	Teaching	Innovation projects
Emotional and Social Skills	-0.061	-0.009	-0.031	-0.076	0.043	0.030
Coexistence	0.105	0.044	0.029	0.052	0.104	0.046
Values	-0.076	-0.060	-0.091	0.224 ^a	0.099	0.119
Addiction Prevention	-0.183	0.056	-0.200 ^a	0.138	-0.026	-0.250^a
Affective-Sexual	-0.076	0.078	-0.035	0.127	-0.103	-0.137
Gender Equality and Violence	0.154	-0.024	0.194	-0.025	0.072	0.068
Nutrition and Sports	0.141	0.198 ^a	0.007	0.129	0.053	-0.015
Self-knowledge and decisions	0.055	-0.014	0.029	-0.208 ^a	-0.007	0.156
Communication	0.063	0.053	0.074	-0.085	-0.228^a	-0.027
Academic Pathways and Options	0.026	-0.032	0.096	0.041	0.181	-0.076
Reinforcement and Study Strategies	0.127	-0.110	0.066	0.047	-0.114	-0.020

^a $p < .05$. Bold values represents the explanation of results.

positive relationship between the academic degree attained by counselors and the development of values ($\rho = 0.224$; $p < 0.05$) and an inverse relationship with self-knowledge and decision-making ($\rho = -0.208$; $p < 0.05$). Counselor teaching has an inverse relationship with the development of communication skills ($\rho = -0.228$; $p < 0.05$). Finally, participation in innovation projects is also inversely related to addiction prevention ($\rho = -0.250$; $p < 0.05$).

However, to determine the direction of these relationships and confirm the existence or absence of significant differences, a second statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. A significant difference ($F = 4.101$; $p < 0.05$) in the relation between counselor gender and the introduction of transversal topics, such as nutrition and sports, was confirmed. In this case, the majority of female counselors introduce this topic. On the other hand, the relationship between counseling experience and preventive treatment of addiction was confirmed, with the existence of significant differences ($F = 2.215$; $p < 0.05$): the less experience a counselor had (less than 5 years), the greater the dedication to these topics. However, the relationship between the counselor's degree and the development of values and the activities related to self-knowledge and decision-making was not confirmed, as no significant differences were found ($F = 2.191$; $p = 0.094$ and $F = 1989$; $p < 0.121$). Although there was a positive relationship for teaching degree based on Spearman's statistic, this result was not confirmed in the ANOVA. On the other hand, the relationship between nonteaching and the development of topics focused on communication was confirmed. A significant difference was found ($F = 5.432$; $p < 0.05$) for those who do not teach being more dedicated to topics of communication, as they are the ones who convey the need to work transversally. Finally, the relationship between participation in innovation projects and dealing with topics, such as the prevention of addiction, was not confirmed, and no significant differences were found between those who did and those who did not participate in this type of project ($F = 0.015$; $p = 0.902$).

In the following block of results RQ2 is answered. The first three nuclei of interest are described with respect to the tutorial action developed by the teachers, from the perspective of the counselors. Tutoring content, actions aimed at students and families, and the sources and instruments used by teachers to better understand their students are considered.

In relation to the content worked on by the teachers responsible for tutoring, they mostly focused on coexistence (87.3%). Emotional and social skills education also carried significant weight (62.7%). More than half of the participating counselors affirmed that the action of tutors is aimed at academic and professional pathways (58.8%) and carrying out preventive actions related to gender violence (52.9%). However, the other content considered relevant in the theoretical framework of tutorial actions were not significantly reflected in the practices performed by tutors, as follows, in decreasing order: academic reinforcement and training in study strategies (45.1%), affective-sexual education (38.2%), values education (36.3%), addiction prevention (34.3%), guidance for self-knowledge and decision-making (33.3%), education in nutrition and sports (6.9%), training in communication skills (8.8%) and development of entrepreneurial attitude (0%).

The same items were studied in regard to the dedication of teachers who do not have to tutor. Overall, less than half of counselors feel that teachers exert some type of guidance. The only area to which more time and effort was dedicated was coexistence, mentioned by 58.8% of the counselors in relation to nontutoring teachers. Time dedicated to training activities in the emotional and social fields was below 33%. However, education in equality and gender violence prevention as well as educational reinforcement actions were closer to those performed by the tutors (44.1 and 40.2%, respectively). The other content decreased proportionally to the above with respect to tutors. In general, terms, a large majority of teachers do not exercise counseling functions with their students, reducing their teaching performance.

This thematic content was not addressed with the same dedication of time and resources in the four courses that were studied. As the most relevant synthesis, the three thematic blocks prioritized in each academic year were arranged in order from highest to lowest. In the first year, 67.64% prioritized coexistence and social skills education activities. The next topic in terms of dedication was training in learning strategies, with 17.64%, and the third was adaptation to the institute and the educational stage, with 7.84%. In the second year, the three thematic blocks in order of priority were coexistence and education in social skills (42.15%), addiction prevention (13.72%) and affective-sexual education (12.74%). In the third year, there were three blocks that shared a leading role: coexistence and education in social

TABLE 2 | Frequencies obtained for the different types of intervention with students.

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	A lot
Informative	0	9,8	74,5	15,7
Educational programs	12,7	46,1	33,3	7,8
Assessment/Diagnosis	43,1	46,1	9,8	1
Corrective/Conflict resolution	0	16,7	54,9	28,4

Bold values represents the explanation of results.

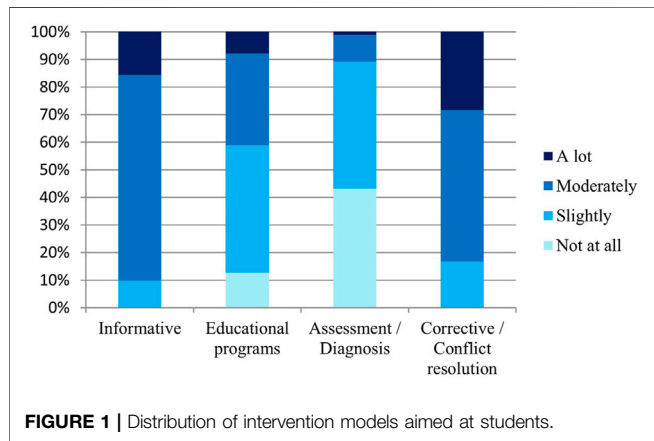


FIGURE 1 | Distribution of intervention models aimed at students.

skills (33.33%), emotional education (31.37%) and affective-sexual education (30.39%). In the fourth year of secondary school, the highest priority was guidance in academic-professional pathways and actions aimed at facilitating decision-making, reaching 87.25% combined. Most participants answered by selecting both responses. Coexistence was chosen as a priority by 5.88%.

The tutoring activities aimed at students were classified into four models or typologies: 1) Informative: to provide and exchange information. 2) Educational programs: to develop training through programming with objectives, content, activities and evaluation. They have an educational and, therefore, preventive purpose. 3) Assessment/Diagnosis: to use assessment instruments to detect needs and collect data in order to direct the intervention, refer to other guidance services, etc. 4) Corrective/Conflict resolution: to act in a corrective manner at specific times after the appearance of a coexistence conflict or poor academic performance.

The results showed the distribution of the procedures used, highlighting those aimed at reporting and correcting problematic situations. The application of educational programs remained at intermediate frequency levels, and very few evaluative or diagnostic actions were carried out by tutors (Table 2 and Figure 1).

Regarding families, results were obtained pertaining to three types of procedures: activities with the purpose of informing, educational actions through programs and information requests. High levels were not reached for any of the three typologies, indicating a rather moderate consideration of interventions aimed at the families of students. However, medium frequencies were found for the two types that refer to

TABLE 3 | Frequencies obtained for the different types of intervention with families.

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	A lot
Informative	2,9	36,3	52	8,8
Educational programs	50,0	43,1	5,9	1
Information request	12,7	38,2	41,2	7,8

Bold values represents the explanation of results.

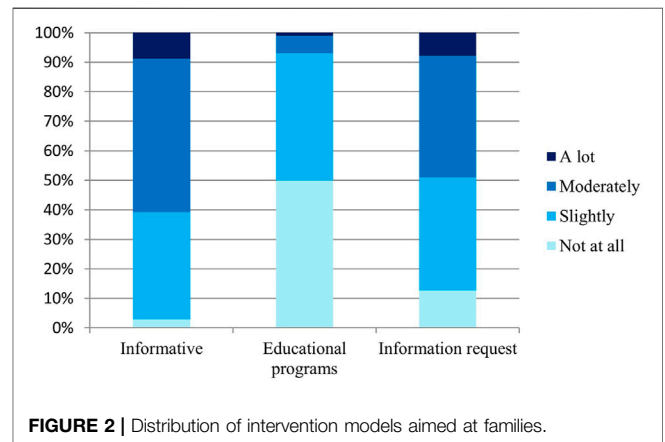
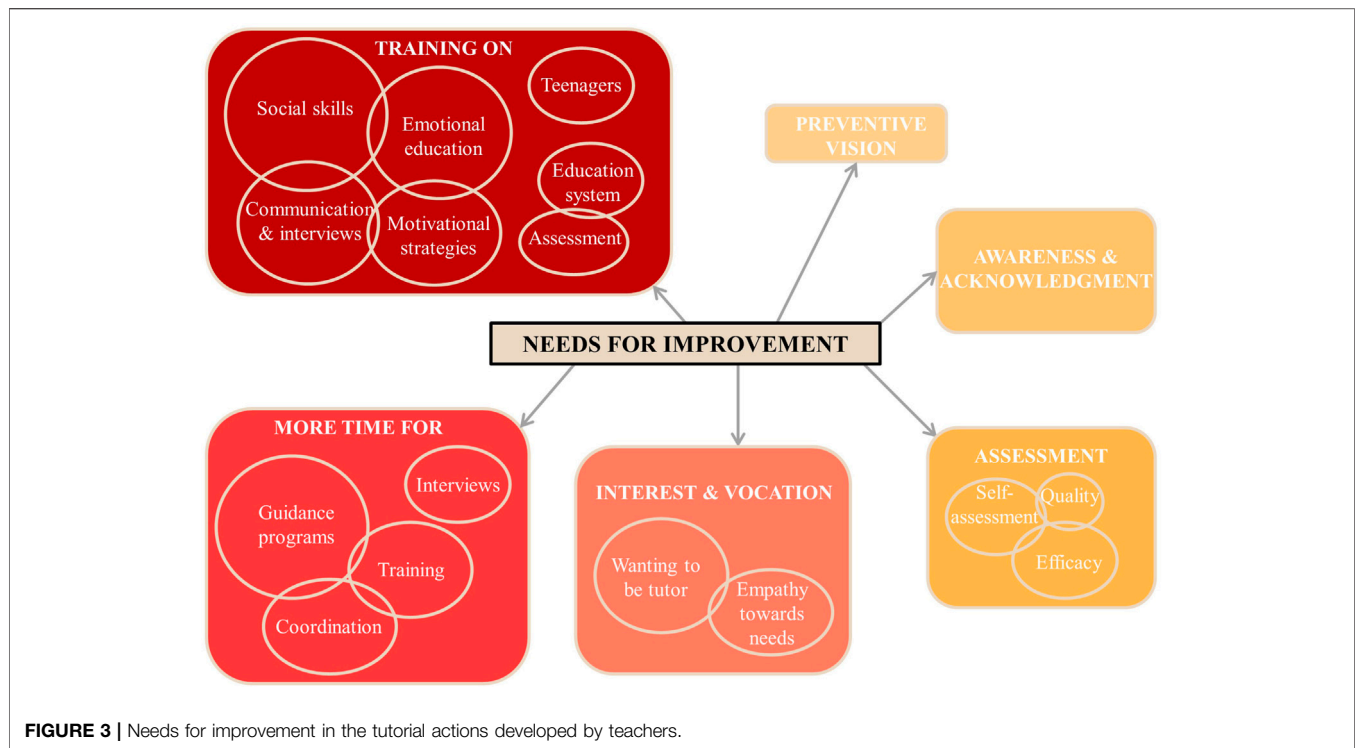


FIGURE 2 | Distribution of intervention models aimed at families.

information exchange, preferably developed through group meetings and individual interviews. There were very few educational program actions (Table 3 and Figure 2).

Examining the individual interviews with families, as it is the most common way of relating to teachers, there were rather wide gaps with respect to the topics discussed. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the counselors stated that teacher-tutors addressed academic topics in interviews, highlighting the information on grades. A total of 89.2% also selected the topic of conflict management. A total of 79.4% addressed training pathways and career opportunities in interviews. A total of 65.7% dealt with aspects of socioaffective development, well-being, social integration and motivation. It is estimated that less than half of the guardians (41.2%) addressed household habits and possible family needs. A total of 21.6% reported that tutors acknowledge, in interviews, students' best and most positive competencies. Finally, only 8.8% answered that they talk about values and personality development.

Regarding the strategies and instruments used to obtain information about the aptitudes, interests and competencies of students, to provide professional advice, the results provide very interesting information. There was not a single procedure that reached 70% affirmative answers; therefore, there is great heterogeneity among procedures that tutors use to get to know their students in vocational guidance. The three data sources most considered by the tutors were qualifications (68.6%), informal learning (64.7%) and systematic observation (60.8%). Forty-eight percent stated that personal interviews were conducted with students. A total of 35.3% felt that tutors conducted interviews with families for the purposes indicated. A total of 34.3% included tests as sources of information. Finally,



the narratives developed by the students, such as portfolios and blogs, were only used by 16.7% of the teachers.

The presentation of the results is concluded with a concise and meaningful assessment of tutorial action in secondary education in relation to effectiveness and the needs detected. The counselors felt that the involvement and commitment of the tutors, in the performance of the functions that are the object of this study, were very diverse. Added to the dispersed responses is that 18.6% gave the tutors at their educational centers a score less than 5 on a scale from 0 to 10, while 26.5% rated them between 5 and 6. Forty-five percent chose 7 or 8 as an answer, 9.8% provided a score of 9 for tutor involvement, and no participant selected the maximum score of 10. Furthermore, the assessment of the regulations on counseling and tutoring in effect in Spain was poorly rated for all items included in the questionnaire. A total of 64.7% of the participating counselors believed that the regulations are not sufficient, 65.7% stated that they lack clarity, and 73.5% rated them as unhelpful for practice.

The last phase of the analysis refers to the data collected through open-ended questions on the questionnaire, related to the needs that the counselors detect and their proposals for improvement (RQ3). There were six categories of perceived interconnected needs, as seen in **Figure 3**. In order of priority from highest to lowest, they were training, time, interest, evaluation, recognition and prevention. Some of them, in turn, included subcategories, presented with their respective saturations and interconnections.

The findings highlight the need for training, above all others. The counselors believed that teachers should be better trained in pedagogy and psychology content related to coexistence skills, emotional education, communication strategies, interviews, the education system, adolescence, motivation and evaluation: “They

greatly need continuing education” (P97), “They lack communication skills, empathy, emotional management, . . .” (P11), “It is more difficult for them to conduct 1 hour of tutoring than the 19 h of class” (P84), and “Very few educational professionals seem to be truly prepared to work with adolescents and understand their personal, social, emotional, issues etc.” (P17). The need with the second-greatest presence was time dedicated to counseling activities by teachers. They feel that more time should be allocated within the school day to develop tutoring programs, conduct interviews, coordinate and train: “More hours set aside for tutoring” (P15), “They need more time, not more resources” (P46), and “The teachers have no time to coordinate among themselves” (P31). The third was awareness of the educational function of teachers, which is evident in career interest and development. A significant number of counselors felt that some of the teaching staff did not want to be tutors and performed this function without motivation: “Some tutors aren’t motivated” (P68), “Predisposition of teachers” (P90), and “Tutors lack the ability to empathize and connect with the students” (P54).

The following thematic categories differed significantly from the first in saturation. Fourth, there was the need to increasingly evaluate tutorial action, which lacks formal means and instruments and is relegated to an assessment of satisfaction and opinions in many cases: “There is little evaluation, only follow-up in the meetings with tutors” (P6), “It is not formally evaluated” (P27), and “With opinion polls to students” (P20). The fifth need refers to the recognition of the role of the guardians. This category is defined as poor clarification and appreciation of their pedagogical work by their own selves, by the students and families: “Lack of specific recognition of the tutorial function” (P12), “A tutor’s work is not valued, neither economically nor in

schedule or in scale” (P101), “I wish to add that the figure of the tutor is voluntary and recognized” (P68). Finally, a sixth category appears with very slight saturation but is included in the results due to its theoretical significance. It is the need to appreciate the positive aspects in students and to intervene preventively. Some participants mention that the vision that many tutors have regarding guidance is exclusively academic and reduced to solving conflicts: “Having more of an interest in aspects other than academics” (P88) and “Seeing and highlighting your strengths and using them to your advantage and enhancing them in the classroom” (P7).

All the results presented correspond to the research questions and the objectives of the research. However, as part of the more open narratives provided by the counselors, ideas were recorded that had not been considered in the design of this study but that have contributed new research interest. The statements by the counselors invited a reflection on their own role as teacher-tutors and whether it is appropriate to invest in their psychopedagogical training for that role or to create a specific and more competent support network. A third approach was also proposed, i.e., to provide each group with more than one tutor and then there would be no distinction between tutor and nontutor teachers. The textual excerpts included “There are magnificent tutors who do their work very well, and others who do not. However, the system does not facilitate the latter to improve. In our center, most programs are carried out by outside parties, who do their job well” (P46), “It is essential to study this and definitely question the actual usefulness of this weekly space (in reference to the hour of tutoring)” (P70), “The fact that not every teacher is a tutor leads to a uneasiness every year that is pretty big depending on the serious headaches caused by the group. It would be interesting if all teachers, with the exception of department heads who perform other administrative functions, were tutors, and if there were 2 or 3 tutors in the most complex groups. Tutoring is so fundamental that we have to take better care of so that it provides a real approach and guidance for the students and their families” (P84).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes a different view to the current research on tutorial action by contributing data obtained directly from those responsible for counseling. The aim is to complement the conclusions provided by the studies conducted from the perspectives of teaching faculty (López, 2013; Vélaz-de-Medrano et al., 2018), students (Amor & Serrano, 2020) and families (Castro et al., 2015). However, considering their exploratory aims, these conclusions are the first step towards a more detailed line of research.

In the first phase of the analysis, significant emerging relationships were found between certain characteristics of the participating counselors and some of the variables studied. Previous hypotheses had not been considered; therefore, the findings invite reflection on the professional meaning of these relationships and the definition of hypotheses for subsequent confirmatory studies. Such heterogeneity and apparent

randomness are perceived in the relationships found, which can be linked to lack of time, excessive tasks and disproportionate student-teacher ratios. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity in guidance functions and regulations regarding the prioritization of the content and diversity of intervention models. Some issues also arise based on the interpretation of the different training profiles leading to the professional role of counselor. The most significant difference regarding the introduction of guidance content in teaching has been found in relation to gender and is in favor of women. This result agrees with the conclusions of OECD (2009) when concluding that women focus their teaching centered on students with greater consideration to their personal and cooperative development, and less to the transmission of knowledge. That is, in essence, counselors are professionals with vastly different personal and training backgrounds who develop the same professional path, coinciding with other studies carried out with educational professionals (Sutton and Fall 1995; Oyifioda and Iornenge, 2020). Is this heterogeneity positive in the professional role of educational guidance?

The first conclusion refers to the beliefs that counselors express in this study regarding the educational, not didactic, work of teachers in their schools. In general, guidance actions developed thus far are insufficient, unmotivated in many cases and very heterogeneous. There is a lack of consensus regarding the organization of content, use of strategies, selection of evaluation instruments and implementation of actions. In addition, counselors perceive wide differences between the actions of tutors and other teachers, although all teachers should develop guidance work, according to the rules and theory (González-Benito and Vélaz de Medrano, 2014).

The problems of demotivated tutors and the lack of recognition coincide with the needs detected in the research that gather their opinion in this regard (López, 2013). On the other hand, some of the needs found in this study correspond to the mismatch between the real and ideal dedication of tutors to guidance work found by Vélaz-de-Medrano et al. (2018). In their conclusions, several causes are mentioned that are related, in a circular way, with the dissatisfaction expressed by tutors: high level of self-demand, insufficient training, lack of time and complex contexts. In the results of this research, there are also several categories of needs interconnected by counselors. As seen in **Figure 3**, there is full agreement regarding the gaps in training and time. However, counselors do not perceive the high level of self-demand to which teacher-tutors feel subjected in conjunction with little training. The possibility emerges that there is not enough mutual understanding and that, in a complex and demanding context, both types of professionals need more tools for communication, empathy and coordination. In addition, from the perspective of counselors, other deficiencies have been detected that, although less saturated, are also relevant. They refer to the fact that the evaluation of interventions is not very useful; it is not aimed at assessing quality but satisfaction and is infrequent. Additionally, teachers do not conceive of tutoring from a preventive perspective but rather under the concept of interventions aimed at “putting out fires”, solving problems and informing families about academic issues.

The need to increase pedagogical and guidance training among all secondary school teachers in Spain fully coincides with the

guidelines indicated by Imbernón (2019), among others, for a long time. It is an argument for which the theoretical visions of two areas of pedagogical knowledge are fully integrated: guidance and didactics. However, this has not yet been reflected in the plans for the initial training of secondary school teachers. These plans continue to be more concerned with the expansion of curricular content and specialization pathways, as well as digital innovation, than with revaluing the humanization of the educational process (Loughran and Hamilton, 2016).

When evaluating the coincidences and discrepancies between perspectives from which tutorial action is studied, some doubts also emerge that invite further research and contrasts. For example, what topics are covered in the interviews between tutors and relatives of students? None of the counselors left this question blank, obtaining yes/no answers for all the proposed items in all cases. That is, the counselors show their beliefs about something that happens without being present. The results give much greater presence to some topics in the interviews, such as conflict and academic pathways, to the detriment of other topics, such as positive competencies and personality development. However, by inference, a finding is also obtained related to the authority shown by the counselors in regard to commenting on the most purely pedagogical actions performed by teachers, using information from their perception and interpretation. This idea is consistent with the conclusions reached by Hernández and Mederos (2018) in their study on the self-definition of expert counselors in educational institutions.

When interpreting the results by nuclei of interest, several specific conclusions are also interesting. One of the concerns that motivated the design of this research is obtaining knowledge regarding what guidance content is taught by tutors and whether all teachers integrate such content in the subjects they teach. The purpose of accounting for what time is spent, with what order of priority and in which courses has been achieved, considering the results with the prudence that corresponds to the size of the sample. The first paradox generated is that the content was most effective for students from first to third grade, that is, training in social skills, improving coexistence and emotional education, areas in which counselors refer the most need for teacher training. The second arises when verifying that some topics, such as education in values, affectivity and sexuality, addiction prevention, communication or entrepreneurship, are not very visible. Specifically, a significant number of participants alluded to the lack of communication skills exhibited by tutors in particular and by teachers in general but hardly considered communicative competence in the programming of tutorial action aimed at students. Communication seems to be eternally forgotten in training plans, both in secondary education and in teacher training itself (Chan et al., 2011).

The prioritization of content related to vocational guidance in the fourth year is not a surprise and is logical. However, the fact of being practically absent in previous courses and concentrating on making academic and professional decisions leads us to think that students do not learn self-determination progressively; they do not become competent in decision-making. Based on the results obtained, this topic is still far from being integrated by schools into career guidance content (Andrei and Solberg, 2019; Babarović et al., 2020).

Relatedly, there is little intervention through educational programs. This reality has been confirmed in two ways: through questions about the most commonly used intervention models with students and families and through open-ended questions about improvement needs. What is worrying is that guidance actions lack preventive and developmental vision. The counseling model prevails, with great dedication to managing conflicts and needs as they arise. This detected reality is far from the authentic curricular integration of counseling (Sultana R, 2018; Boland et al., 2019).

In relation to the assessment instruments, the least used instruments are those with which students assume the leading role and lead them to reflect, such as the construction of narratives. The systematic evaluation to better know students and accompany them in decision-making is not very common, based on intermediate frequencies, although the use of observation is quite widespread. The two main conclusions for this section are the heterogeneity of processes and the majority use of information from daily and informal treatment. Both lead to inferences of spontaneity and a lack of evaluative sense. They correspond to the detected need for teacher training in evaluation skills. In this aspect, it would be desirable to improve the assessment processes developed, both to know the student in transversal skills and socioemotional development and to conduct formative assessments in subjects.

The use of interviews was studied specifically because of its transcendence within the guidance processes developed by teaching faculty. Interviews with students are not as common as could be expected; their use is estimated below 50% as a vocational guidance tool, and the percentage decreases in relation to their use with families. In addition, counselors believe that the topics addressed are grades, academic difficulties, pathways and conflict management, to a greater extent. If one considers the use of interviews with approximately half of the high school students and that the topics on emotional, social development, transversal competences and values occupy between 8 and 60%, it can be concluded that approximately three-quarters of the students never have a personal and private conversation with their tutor about the most valuable counseling content. This is an inference that requires more scientific evidence but that, within the framework of this study, invites reflection on what may be the greatest lack of the system in relation to what adolescents most need (Aguar and Conceição, 2015; Park et al., 2018).

Finally, within the needs and shortcomings described by the counselors, the regulations from the Spanish educational administration stands out as being not very useful for practice, insufficient and lacking clarity. This is a common description in counselor meetings and professional journals (APOEX, 2019). With this study, quantitative data were obtained that support this opinion distributed throughout the national territory and with a sample of highly experienced counselors.

As it is an exploratory study of a descriptive nature, there are several limitations. First, the need for interpretation of qualitative data. Second, the size of the sample that makes it impossible to generalize the results. To continue advancing in the line and complement this study, the prospective research line focuses on conducting in-depth interviews with counselors, tutors and students. It is intended to combine a dual approach, at the national and regional levels, linking the

results of the exploratory study already conducted with interviews. Another objective is to enrich collaborative continuity with professional entities of psychopedagogy and initiate relationships with public bodies competent in education. The aim is to obtain support for the research line and to transfer the conclusions to future projects related to regulations for tutorial actions.

New questions also arise: How can the theoretical vision of tutoring and practical action in the current system be approached with maximum sustainability? Currently, in the Spanish education system, counselors have the function of coordinating and overseeing tutorial actions and are overwhelmed by the lack of regulatory concreteness and the ratios with which they work. Can direct intervention by counselors be increased in a system in which teachers lack sufficient training and dedication to tutoring, or should guidance training for teachers be prioritized and their dedication to teaching be increased for these purposes? Ultimately, the possibility emerges that training in emotional and social competencies, drug addiction prevention or affective-sexual education, among other content, can be addressed by outside agents who are experts in these matters or that a new professional profile is generated within the educational institutions in charge of these functions that reinforce guidance departments.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Aragón Research Ethics Committee. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, CF-L, AM, and AP; formal analysis, CF-L, AM, AP, and AR; methodology, AR and CF-L; writing—review and editing, CF-L, AM, AP, and AR.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.737163/full#supplementary-material>

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