Adapting To The Unseen: Understanding Workplace Learning Disruptions In Educational Counseling During The COVID-19

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Abstract

This paper aims to comprehensively explore and analyze the experiences of educational counselors amidst workplace learning disruptions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The present research unfolds the challenges, actions, and results (CAR) framework, providing a comprehensive understanding of educational counselors' responses to workplace learning disruptions. The study underlines the dimensions of technological integration, revealing how educational counselors adapted to remote counseling. Aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 and SDG 3, the study underscores the central role of educational counselors in fostering a resilient, inclusive, and technologically advanced educational environment. The findings contribute to the scholarly discourse on workplace learning disruptions, offering qualitative insights into the professionalization of educational counselors in the post-pandemic era. This study not only addresses critical gaps in the literature but also provides a foundation for future research and targeted interventions to enhance the adaptability and effectiveness of educational counseling in evolving educational landscapes, under the paradigm of workplace learning disruptions.

Keywords: *workplace learning; educational counseling; Covid-19 disruptions; counselor adaptability; challenge/action/result analysis.*

1. Background

1.1. Covid-19 Impact on Workplace Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly transformed education, necessitating rapid adaptations to traditional teaching and learning practices (Dhawan, 2020). The sudden shift to online education has not only led to the closure of educational institutions but has also presented an unprecedented opportunity to embrace digital learning modalities (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). [1]This substantial disruption extends beyond classroom dynamics to impact teacher education programs and the overall operational landscape of universities and schools (Carrillo & Flores, 2020).

The need for a comprehensive pedagogical approach integrating technology to support teaching and learning is now more evident than ever (Granić & Marangunic, 2019). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emerges as a credible framework for evaluating diverse learning technologies, with its core variables—perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness—significantly influencing the acceptance of technology-enhanced learning (Huang et al., 2020; Rad et al., 2022; Rad et al., 2023; Rad et al., 2022).

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In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions worldwide have grappled with the imperative to implement online learning activities (Huang et al., 2020). However, understanding the nuances of student engagement, particularly in Latin American higher education institutions during this unprecedented time, is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of online learning (Raes et al., 2019).

Beyond the structural shifts in education, the pandemic has unleashed negative psychological effects on individuals, necessitating attention to resilience and coping strategies (Donnelly, R., & Patrinos, 2021). Resilience emerges as a pivotal factor in bolstering the well-being of both healthcare and non-healthcare workers (Gaur et al., 2020). The adoption of adaptive coping strategies becomes imperative for managing the emergency and work-related stress during the ongoing crisis (Yu, 2021). Notably, positive factors influencing resilience contribute to posttraumatic growth, emphasizing the potential for personal and professional development amid adversity (Salam et al., 2019). Organizational interventions must prioritize the enhancement of workers' adaptive coping skills, resilience, and posttraumatic growth to foster well-being during the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only disrupted traditional education but has fundamentally transformed workplace learning for educational counselors (Marici et. al., 2022). The shift to online education, driven by the closure of physical institutions, has opened avenues for digital learning.

Despite the growing body of research addressing the broader impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the nuanced experiences and specific challenges faced by educational counselors in adapting to and navigating the transformed landscape of workplace learning. While existing studies touch upon the broader context of online education and the psychological effects of the pandemic, a focused exploration into the unique professional requirements, coping mechanisms, and pedagogical strategies employed by educational counselors during this period is notably underrepresented. Addressing this gap is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the specific dimensions of workplace learning disruption for educational counselors, providing valuable insights for targeted interventions and support systems in the post-pandemic era.

1.2. Formal and Informal Learning in the Workplace

Workplace learning, an indispensable facet of professional growth, has faced unprecedented challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Central to workplace learning, the dichotomy of formal and informal learning dynamics has been profoundly influenced by the pandemic (Chen & Bryer, 2012). Formal learning, structured and planned, typically involves training programs and workshops. In contrast, informal learning is characterized by spontaneous, day-to-day experiences and interactions (Chen & Bryer, 2012). The synergy between these two modes, especially facilitated by social media platforms, is a critical aspect emphasized by Chen and Bryer (2012). They contend that social media serves as a powerful tool for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and bridging the gap between planned and spontaneous learning. This integration is vital for ensuring a continuous learning environment within organizations.

Manuti et al. (2015) conducted an extensive review of formal and informal learning in the workplace, underlining the necessity for a balanced approach. Recognizing both as valuable, they advocate for organizational initiatives that provide employees opportunities for engagement in both structured programs and spontaneous, experiential learning activities. This balance is crucial in educational counseling, where the nature of the profession demands not only theoretical knowledge but also practical and context-specific insights.

In terms of Knowledge and Experience as Learning Frames, Tynjälä's (2013) 3-P model presents a comprehensive view of the role of personal, professional, and practical knowledge as learning frames in workplace learning. Personal knowledge, encompassing individual beliefs and experiences, intertwines with professional knowledge, which pertains to theoretical understanding. Practical knowledge, vital for real-world application, forms the third pillar of this model. In the context of educational counseling, where the unique needs of students and the dynamic nature of educational environments demand adaptability, this model offers a nuanced lens through which to understand the multifaceted dimensions of workplace learning.

Manuti et al. (2015) reiterate the profound impact of knowledge and experience on workplace learning outcomes. They argue that employees' prior experiences significantly influence their learning processes and outcomes. In the realm of educational counseling, where personalized approaches are pivotal, understanding and acknowledging the diverse knowledge bases and experiences of counselors become crucial for effective learning interventions.

Recognizing and valuing learning outcomes, particularly those arising from non-formal and informal learning, are pivotal for promoting continuous learning and professional development (Schaap et al., 2012). Schaap et al. (2012) stress the need for formal recognition and policies supporting non-formal and informal learning outcomes in vocational education. Such recognition not only motivates learners but also enhances their employability, a crucial consideration in the field of educational counseling where adaptability and diverse skill sets are paramount.

Rijdt et al. (2013) analyze the importance of recognizing and connecting formal and informal learning experiences. They propose mobile applications as tools to document and transfer learning from educational settings to the workplace. In educational counseling, where the shift to virtual and hybrid learning environments has been accelerated by the pandemic, these tools can play a pivotal role in ensuring the continuity of learning experiences.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges and opportunities for workplace learning in the realm of educational counseling. Adapting to disruptions, understanding the synergy between formal and informal learning, recognizing the influence of knowledge and experience, and valuing learning outcomes are critical aspects that need detailed exploration.

The conclusions of the Council of Europe published in May 2009 regarding a strategic framework aimed at ensuring European cooperation in the field of education and vocational training emphasized the promotion of equity and social cohesion in various contexts, without outlining a legislative segment, and without identifying a potential pandemic at that time. The heightened emphasis on ensuring equity during the Covid period has provided solutions reflected in current normative acts, constantly modified, and targeting only a very small percentage of truly vital integration in ensuring a learning area that combines planned learning with spontaneous learning. Currently, higher dual education, through the new Higher Education Law, provides the basis for effective workplace learning (Law 199/2024 - CHAPTER X: Dual Higher Education), combining responsibilities along the lines of teaching-specific activities with those at the applied and research levels, reflecting evaluation as well as concrete sharing of duties among various economic operators and the higher education institution.

1.3. Theories of Workplace Learning Oriented on the Process

Workplace learning is a crucial aspect of professional development and skill acquisition. Understanding the theories that underpin workplace learning can provide valuable insights into the process and enhance the effectiveness of learning programs (Hager, 2011; Wenger-

Trayner et al., 2014; Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2014). This paper aims to

synthesize and integrate research findings on theories of workplace learning oriented on the process.

Experiential learning theories and a socio-cultural perspective have been identified as important and relevant frameworks for understanding workplace learning. Gijbels, Endedijk, and Hirschler (2021) emphasize the significance of communities of practice in facilitating workplace learning. These communities provide a social context where individuals can engage in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. Additionally, Manuti et al. (2015) highlight the relevance of experiential learning in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of learning through practical experiences and reflection. This perspective aligns with the socio-cultural approach, which recognizes the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping learning experiences (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

Professional identity development is a crucial aspect of workplace learning. Trede, Macklin, and Bridges (2012) emphasize the role of higher education in fostering professional identity development. They argue that workplace learning experiences contribute to the formation of professional identities by providing opportunities for individuals to engage in authentic professional practices and develop a sense of belonging within their professional communities.

Learner motivation plays a significant role in workplace learning programs. Carless (2014) highlights the direct link between workplace learning programs and learner motivation, emphasizing that motivated learners are more likely to acquire knowledge and skills effectively. Noe, Tews, and Dachner (2010) further explore learner engagement as a perspective for enhancing our understanding of learner motivation and workplace learning. They argue that creating engaging learning environments and providing meaningful learning experiences can enhance learner motivation and promote effective workplace learning.

While the current body of research offers valuable insights into workplace learning theories, particularly focused on processes, there exists a need for further exploration within the context of educational counselors facing disruptions in their workplace learning. Addressing the specific mechanisms by which communities of practice facilitate learning becomes crucial in the unique challenges presented to educational counselors. To comprehensively understand the factors influencing the effectiveness of these communities amid disruptions can significantly contribute to the design and implementation of targeted workplace learning programs tailored for educational counselors (Gijbels et al., 2021).

Existing literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has primarily focused on broader aspects of education, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of the unique challenges faced by educational counselors. Furthermore, studies acknowledge the shift to online education, but there is a dearth of research specifically examining the intersection of workplace learning and the rapid integration of technology in the context of educational counseling. This study addresses this gap by exploring how technological advancements reshape counseling practices and professional identities.

Lastly, the present study identifies a gap in research that explicitly aligns the experiences of educational counselors with the broader global goals, such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). This alignment provides a unique perspective on the contribution of educational counselors to sustainable and inclusive educational practices.

By addressing these critical gaps, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities encountered by educational counselors during the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing valuable insights to the existing body of literature on workplace

learning disruptions.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design
To investigate the disruption of workplace learning among educational counselors, a qualitative study was conducted using the framework approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002; Bryman & Burgess, 2002). The chosen approach was deemed appropriate considering the study's relatively short timeframe and predefined aims and objectives. Ethics approval was obtained from the Center of Research Development and Innovation in Psychology Ethics Committee (Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad) under Protocol 39/04.12.2023, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.2. Sample and Recruitment
Encompassing the educational landscape of western Romania (Arad, Timis, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara, Bihor, Alba, and Gorj), the target population comprised 120 professors enrolled in the post-university program for teachers.

A purposive sampling approach was employed to ensure representation from diverse geographical locations, adopting a maximum variation sample strategy (Patton, 2014). The aim was to include a broad spectrum of educational counselors, considering various demographic factors such as age, sex, years of experience, and titular/substitute professor employment status. To capture the richness of experiences within this educational context, professors were classified based on their self-identified 'primary role,' acknowledging their dual responsibilities in teaching and administrative or managerial functions.

The recruitment process involved direct outreach to professors through academic authorities in each region, ensuring transparency in the sample selection process. Expressions of interest were solicited through official channels, facilitating the purposive selection of 70 participants for focus groups from those willing and available to contribute.

2.3. Data Collection
In alignment with the study's objectives, data collection for this research involved a combination of three physical focus groups (23 participants in the first focus group, 23 participants in the second focus group and 24 participants in the third focus group) and three key informant interviews. Three key informant interviews were individually conducted with an educational counselor, a professional educator specializing in counselor training, and an academic manager involved in the administration of educational programs.

The key informant interviews served as a foundational phase to shape subsequent discussions within the focus groups. These sessions provided a platform for participants to reflect on their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions related to workplace learning during the pandemic.

To facilitate a shared understanding, each interview and focus group began with a basic definition of workplace learning, supplemented by relevant examples. However, participants were encouraged to interpret workplace learning freely, reflecting the study's aim to explore diverse understandings within the context of educational counseling amidst the COVID-19 disruptions. Initial questions collected information regarding participants' backgrounds, knowledge, and their encounters with workplace learning, while subsequent inquiries focused on identifying barriers and enablers in the altered learning landscape. Tailored sets of questions were sent to participants in advance to encourage thoughtful reflections and optimize discussion time during the focus groups.

After each session, the research team engaged in reflective discussions to distill critical

themes, ensuring consistency and reliability across data collection. Sessions were

scheduled during work hours, at Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad facility, within 3 in person focus groups employed during the first 2 weeks of December 2023.

Upon the ending of the three focus-group sessions, each of the 70 participants engaged in a reflective exercise integral to the data collection process. Specifically, participants were presented with a reflection card (Piht et al., 2012), adhering to ethical guidelines and consent procedures, which prompted them to articulate a detailed account of a minimum of three instances personally encountered during the emergence of disrupted workplace learning within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this narrative, participants were encouraged to expound on the specific challenges or scenarios encountered in their professional experience and elucidate the measures or strategies they employed in response to these challenges. This reflective task aimed to extract rich, context-specific insights from participants, providing an avenue for them to impart nuanced perspectives on the complexities of workplace learning disruptions during the pandemic. The responses garnered through this reflection card exercise constituted a valuable dataset, contributing to the depth of the study's findings. The subsequent analysis involved a systematic examination of these individual reflections, aligning with the qualitative research methodology employed in this investigation.

The data collection process adhered to the comprehensive and systematic coding methodology, specifically employing the CAR principle—Challenge/Action/Result (Rad & Balas, 2020). This structured approach aimed to elicit detailed insights from participants, emphasizing the narrative and sequential aspects of their behavioral responses to disrupted workplace learning scenarios during the COVID-19 pandemic.

• Challenge (C): Participants were prompted to articulate and describe the specific challenges or circumstances they encountered in their professional setting during the disruptive phase of workplace learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This phase aimed to capture the contextual challenges and the nature of challenges faced by educational counselors, providing a foundation for understanding the situational dynamics.

• Action (A): Following the depiction of the challenge, participants were then directed to expound on the actions they undertook in response to the identified challenges. This narrative sought to unveil the strategies, interventions, or adaptive measures employed by participants to address the challenges posed by the disruption of workplace learning.

• Result (R): Subsequently, participants were prompted to articulate the outcomes or results stemming from their actions. This involved describing the consequences, impacts, or efficacy of the measures taken in response to the challenges faced. The focus on results aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and implications of the participants' behavioral responses in the context of disrupted workplace learning.

This coding framework facilitated a structured and standardized analysis of the qualitative data collected, ensuring consistency and rigor in the interpretation of participants' narratives. By categorizing responses according to the CAR principle, the study aimed to distill meaningful patterns and insights, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the varied ways in which educational counselors navigated and coped with the challenges precipitated by the disruption of workplace learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CAR principle (Challenge/Action/Result) was adopted as the guiding analytical framework for this research, specifically aiming to investigate the behavior of educational counselors facing challenges in the context of disrupted workplace learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The choice of the Context-Action-Result (CAR) system as the behavior model holds particular relevance in this context. This model encapsulates the interconnected nature of challenges, actions, and results as fundamental components that shape behavior. By adopting this model, the study aims to investigate how changes in

these components influence the engagement of educational counselors in workplace learning amidst disruptive circumstances.

2.4. Thematic Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the study, a thematic analysis approach was employed to derive patterns, themes, and insights from the collected data. The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, allowing for a systematic and rigorous exploration of the participants' experiences.

The thematic analysis involved the following steps:

• Familiarization with the data: The transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to gain a deep understanding of the content.

• Generating initial codes: Codes were systematically applied to relevant portions of the data, capturing key concepts and ideas.

• Searching for themes: Codes were collated into potential themes, exploring connections and patterns within the data.

• Reviewing themes: Themes were critically reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance.

•Defining and naming themes: Clear definitions and names were assigned to each theme, solidifying their meaning.

This thematic analysis approach aligns with the qualitative nature of the study, offering a robust framework for deriving meaningful insights from the participants' narratives. The clear delineation of the thematic analysis process addresses concerns about the empirical operationalization of central concepts, ensuring reliability and validity in the interpretation of the findings.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of the Study Sample

The study sample consisted of 70 educational counselors actively engaged in a post-university program for teachers in the western regions of Romania, including Arad, Timiș, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, Bihor, Alba, and Gorj. Participants voluntarily responded to the research, representing a response rate of 58.3% of the total cohort of 120 educators enrolled in the program.

The participants were distributed across the aforementioned regions, ensuring a diverse representation of educational counselors from various geographical contexts within western Romania. The study encompassed educational counselors from diverse disciplines: psychology, educational sciences and special psychopedagogy, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the educational counsellor's background.

The sample included participants with varying years of professional experience, providing a spectrum of insights based on their tenure in the field of education from 1 to 20 years with an average mean of 7 years. Both titular 72% and substitute professor 28% educational counselors participated, offering a comprehensive view of workplace learning experiences across different employment statuses.

Demographic details included age (diverse age groups 24 to 55 years with an average of 35 years) and gender diversity, providing an overview of the key characteristics of the study sample, ensuring transparency in the composition of the participant group.
Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse characteristics within the study sample.

Table1. Characteristics of the Study Sample

Characteristic	Description
total participants	70 educational counsellors
specializations	psychology, educational sciences, special psychopedagogy
roles	30 counsellors, 30 speech therapists, 10 clinical psychologists
geographical distribution	60% in metropolitan areas, 40% in rural/regional districts
professional experience	ranged from < 1 year to > 20 years of experience with an average of 7 years
employment status	titular 72% and substitute professor 28% educational counselors
gender distribution	67% female, 33% male
age range	diverse age groups 24 to 55 years with an average of 35 years

The study sample encompasses 30 counselors, 30 speech therapists, and 10 clinical psychologists, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on workplace learning dynamics within the educational counseling domain. Three distinct allied educational counselling specializations were represented in the study, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the educational counsellor profession. Specializations included psychology (n = 48), educational sciences (n = 12), and special psychopedagogy (n = 10).

The participants were spread across the western regions of Romania, with 60% (n = 42) employed in metropolitan areas and 40% (n = 28) in rural areas. This distribution ensured a diverse range of workplace contexts.

The sample encompassed a wide spectrum of professional experience, from newly enrolled counsellors (< 1 year experience) to senior educational counselors with over 20 years of experience, with an average mean of 7 years. This diversity contributed to a detailed understanding of workplace learning across different career stages.

The demographic diversity within the sample enhances the generalizability of the findings and underscores the representativeness of the study within the specific context of educational counselors in western Romania.

3.2. Challenge/Action/Result Analysis of the COVID-19 Disrupted Workplace Learning Process

The analysis of responses from the 70 educational counselors provided valuable insights into the challenges, actions, and results pertaining to diverse themes in the context of workplace learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following answers summarize the experiences of the participants:

Psychological safety and workplace learning: "Moving towards remote learning posed a challenge in maintaining psychological safety during virtual counseling. To address this, I proactively engaged in team-building activities, established open communication channels, and participated in training for online learning environments management. This ensured effective virtual counseling, fostering open discussions and creating a supportive online community." - Educational counsellor 1.

This theme represents responses where counselors stress the importance of psychological safety in remote counseling and describe proactive steps to create a secure online space.

Many counselors mentioned team-building activities as vital for fostering a sense of belonging in the virtual work environment. Additionally, several participants noted the positive effects of open communication channels in facilitating learning and sharing.

Self-directed learning in counseling work: "Adjusting counseling approaches to remote settings required the cultivation of new skills. In response, I initiated self-directed learning by exploring online resources, attending webinars on virtual counseling techniques, and

seeking guidance from experienced peers. This proactive approach empowered me to enhance my virtual counseling skills and effectively tackle remote counseling challenges." - Educational counsellor 2.

This theme includes responses where counselors stress the importance of adjusting counseling approaches to the remote setting and actively pursuing self-directed learning to acquire new skills. Many participants emphasized seeking guidance from experienced peers as crucial, indicating a collaborative aspect to self-directed learning. Additionally, engagement in webinars and exploration of online resources were commonly cited as valuable strategies for skill acquisition.

Workplace learning experience and work attitudes: "The sudden transition to remote learning brought challenges in maintaining job satisfaction and organizational commitment. To counter this, I actively participated in virtual workplace learning programs, seeking opportunities to enhance skills and stay connected with organizational goals. Engagement in virtual workplace learning positively influenced job satisfaction and commitment, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development." - Educational counsellor 3.

This theme comprises responses where counselors consider the effect of the abrupt shift to remote learning on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, emphasizing proactive participation in virtual workplace learning programs to tackle these challenges. Many participants stressed the importance of staying aligned with organizational goals as a motivator for engaging in virtual workplace learning programs actively. The positive impact of such engagements on job satisfaction was emphasized in numerous responses.

Informal workplace learning: "The shift to remote work highlighted the need for informal learning strategies in educational counseling. In response, I explored virtual platforms for informal knowledge sharing, collaborated in online forums, and participated in virtual communities of practice. Embracing virtual informal learning methods facilitated knowledge exchange and collaboration, addressing challenges posed by the remote work environment." - Educational counsellor 4.

This theme encompasses responses where counselors recognize the transition to remote work and the resulting requirement for informal learning strategies, with an emphasis on leveraging virtual platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration. A substantial number of responses underscored the importance of virtual communities of practice in facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Adapting to remote learning: technological challenges and opportunities: "As an educational counselor, the rapid integration of technology for remote counseling demanded upskilling in virtual communication and online counseling techniques. Active engagement in technological training, attendance at webinars on online counseling, and the embrace of new digital platforms empowered me to provide effective online counseling. This demonstrated the significance of technological literacy in my practice." - Educational counsellor 5.

This theme captures responses where counselors recognize the challenges arising from the rapid adoption of technology for remote counseling and describe proactive steps taken to acquire new skills and adapt. Participants emphasize the importance of technological

literacy, with many mentioning attending webinars as a specific strategy to improve their proficiency in online counseling techniques.

Impact on mental health counseling: "The rise in mental health concerns due to the pandemic led to a notable increase in the need for counseling services within our school

community. In response, I took proactive steps to enhance my skills and knowledge, particularly in addressing pandemic-related stressors. This included seeking specialized training and adopting telehealth practices to ensure continuity of care. Additionally, I collaborated closely with mental health professionals to provide comprehensive support to students, educators, and parents during this challenging time." - Educational counsellor 6.

This theme encompasses responses from counselors who recognize the increased demand for mental health counseling during the pandemic and describe proactive steps taken to address it. These measures include seeking specialized training and adopting new practices to effectively handle the surge in demand. Many participants emphasized the importance of collaboration with mental health professionals in providing comprehensive support. The phrase "effectively meeting" indicates a sense of achievement in responding to the heightened need for mental health services.

Professional burnout and well-being concerns: "The heightened demand for counseling services during the pandemic raised well-being concerns and the potential for burnout. To mitigate these challenges, I prioritized self-care, participated in well-being workshops, and established boundaries between work and personal life. Targeted workplace learning initiatives focusing on well-being strategies contributed to resilience and mitigated burnout risks." - Educational counsellor 7.

This theme reflects responses from counselors who recognize the challenges brought about by the increased demand for counseling services. They emphasize proactive measures aimed at addressing well-being concerns and preventing burnout through targeted workplace learning initiatives. Participants consistently emphasize the significance of establishing boundaries between work and personal life as a crucial strategy for well-being. The phrase "targeted workplace learning initiatives" indicates a purposeful and strategic approach to addressing well-being issues.

Virtual communities of practice, fostering collaboration in a remote environment: "I identified significant disparities in students' access to technology that raised equity concerns. In response, I took active steps to address the digital divide by not only recognizing the issue but also advocating for essential resources. Specifically, I implemented targeted counseling strategies to bridge gaps in access, recognizing the importance of creating an inclusive and collaborative virtual learning environment." - Educational counsellor 8.

The prevalent theme among participants is the recognition of disparities and the adoption of proactive measures to ensure equity. The term 'advocated for resources' emerges consistently, highlighting a shared commitment among counselors to secure the necessary tools and technologies for all students. Furthermore, the focus on workplace learning initiatives underscores a broader organizational approach aimed at mitigating the impact of the digital divide. This emphasis on holistic strategies contributes to ensuring equitable access to counseling services for all students, aligning with the overarching goal of fostering collaboration in the remote learning landscape.

Digital divide and equity concerns: "Disparities in students' access to technology highlighted equity concerns for me as an educational counselor. In response, I actively addressed the digital divide, advocating for resources and implementing targeted counseling strategies to bridge gaps in access. Workplace learning initiatives focused on mitigating the impact of the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to counseling services for all students." - Educational counsellor 9.

This theme encompasses responses where counselors acknowledge disparities in students' access to technology and outline proactive measures taken to address equity concerns, including advocacy, implementation of targeted strategies, and workplace learning initiatives. A substantial number of participants mentioned the term 'advocated for resources' as a specific action taken to address the digital divide. Additionally, the emphasis

on workplace learning initiatives demonstrated a broader organizational approach to mitigating the impact of the digital divide.

Resilience and adaptability as key competencies: "The disruptions caused by the pandemic underscored the need for resilience and adaptability in my role as an educational counselor. Workplace learning initiatives prioritized the development of resilience and adaptability competencies, offering training programs and resources. I demonstrated increased resilience, adapted counseling strategies to changing circumstances, and contributed to the overall resilience of the educational community." - Educational counsellor 10.

This theme encompasses responses where counselors acknowledge the disruptions caused by the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of resilience and adaptability as key competencies. Workplace learning initiatives are highlighted as instrumental in developing these competencies. The term 'contributed to the overall resilience' was consistently used to convey a sense of collective effort in enhancing resilience within the educational community. Additionally, the mention of 'training programs and resources' indicated a multifaceted approach to developing resilience and adaptability.

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of educational counselors' responses, categorized according to the Challenges, Actions, and Results (CAR) framework. The thematic analysis illuminates distinct challenges faced, the corresponding actions taken, and the achieved results within each identified theme. This structured presentation allows for a detailed exploration of counselors' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the dynamics between challenges encountered, actions implemented, and the subsequent outcomes. The CAR framework provides a structured approach for comprehensively analyzing the various aspects of workplace learning disruptions.

Table 2. Challenges, Actions, and Results (CAR) Analysis

Theme	Challenge	Action	Result
Psychological safety and workplace learning	The abrupt shift to remote learning raised concerns about maintaining psychological safety in virtual counseling environments.	Counselors proactively engaged in virtual team-building activities, implemented open communication channels, and participated in training on fostering a psychologically safe online space.	The establishment of a psychologically safe environment allowed for effective virtual counseling, facilitated open discussions, and contributed to a supportive online community.
Self-directed learning in counseling work	Educational counselors faced the need to adapt their counseling approaches to remote settings, requiring new skills and strategies.	Counselors took the initiative to engage in self-directed learning, exploring online resources, attending webinars on virtual counseling techniques, and seeking guidance from experienced peers.	The cultivation of self-directed learning practices empowered counselors to enhance their virtual counseling skills and adapt their approaches to effectively address the challenges of remote counseling.
Workplace learning experience and work attitudes	The sudden shift to remote learning presented challenges in	Counselors actively participated in virtual workplace learning programs,	Engagement in virtual workplace learning positively influenced

	maintaining job satisfaction and organizational commitment among educational counselors.	seeking opportunities to enhance their skills and stay connected with organizational goals.	counselors' job satisfaction and commitment, highlighting the importance of ongoing professional development.
Informal workplace learning	The transition to remote work emphasized the need for informal learning strategies tailored to the unique context of educational counseling.	Counselors explored virtual platforms for informal knowledge sharing, collaborated in online forums, and participated in virtual communities of practice.	The adoption of virtual informal learning methods facilitated knowledge exchange and collaboration, addressing the challenges posed by the remote work environment.
Adapting to remote learning: technological challenges and opportunities	Educational counselors faced the rapid integration of technology for remote counseling, requiring upskilling in virtual communication and online counseling techniques.	Counselors actively engaged in technological training, attended webinars on online counseling, and embraced new digital platforms for counseling services.	The successful adaptation to remote learning technologies empowered counselors to provide effective online counseling, demonstrating the importance of technological literacy.
Impact on mental health counseling	The pandemic-induced increase in mental health concerns heightened the demand for counseling services in educational settings.	Counselors sought specialized training to address pandemic-related stressors, adopted telehealth practices, and collaborated with mental health professionals.	Educational counselors effectively responded to the surge in demand, providing crucial mental health support to students, educators, and parents.
Professional burnout and well-being concerns	The heightened demand for counseling services raised concerns about the well-being and potential burnout of educational counselors.	Counselors prioritized self-care, participated in well-being workshops, and established boundaries between work and personal life.	Targeted workplace learning initiatives focusing on well-being strategies contributed to counselor resilience and mitigated burnout risks.
Virtual communities of practice: fostering collaboration in a remote environment	Fostering collaboration in a remote environment through virtual communities of practice. The digital divide posed a significant hurdle, hindering equal	Counselors adopted a specialized strategy for virtual community building, focusing on promoting active participation, knowledge sharing, and collaboration	Collaboration in the remote environment significantly improved. The digital divide's impact was mitigated, leading to enhanced engagement and

	participation and engagement among members.	within the remote setting.	shared learning experiences among participants.
Digital divide and equity concerns	Disparities in students' access to technology highlighted equity concerns for educational counselors.	Counselors took proactive measures to tackle the digital divide by championing for necessary resources and employing focused counseling strategies to close the accessibility gaps.	Workplace learning initiatives focused on mitigating the impact of the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to counseling services for all students.
Resilience and adaptability as key competencies	The disruptions caused by the pandemic emphasized the need for resilience and adaptability among educational counselors.	Workplace learning initiatives prioritized the development of resilience and adaptability competencies, offering training programs and resources.	Educational counselors demonstrated increased resilience, adapted counseling strategies to changing circumstances, and contributed to the overall resilience of the educational community.

The presented Challenges, Actions, and Results (CAR) analysis unveils the complex dynamics of educational counselors' reflections after the COVID-19 pandemic experience. The diverse array of experiences, articulated in their own words, offers a nuanced insight into the dynamics between encountered challenges, implemented actions, and resulting outcomes.

Further, a comprehensive analysis of the most representative responses will be undertaken to provide an in-depth exploration of the emergent themes derived from the reflections of educational counselors in the context of workplace learning disruptions. This discussion aims to contribute significantly to the broader scholarly conversation surrounding workplace learning amidst disruptive periods. It provides valuable insights into the resilience, adaptability, and innovative strategies exhibited by educational counselors as they confront unprecedented challenges.

4. Discussions
The findings of the current study are substantiated by a body of existing research, providing a comprehensive understanding of various facets of workplace learning among educational counselors.

Psychological safety emerges as a pivotal factor in cultivating an environment conducive to workplace learning, aligning with the insights drawn from Nguyen's (2021) research. This study accentuates the managerial role in fostering learning-oriented leadership, delineating specific activities and behaviors that contribute to supporting, educating, and challenging employees. Despite the acknowledged significance of psychological safety, constraints such as limited resources and a lack of commitment from top management, employees, or managers themselves are identified, presenting avenues for further exploration.

Self-directed learning assumes significance within the realm of workplace learning for counselors, a theme echoed in Lemmetty and Collin's (2020) exploration of this practice in the context of ICT work. The study underscores the importance of individual agency in

shaping workplace learning experiences, emphasizing the need to empower counselors to take ownership of their learning through engaging in self-directed learning activities.

Investigating how workplace learning experiences affect job satisfaction and organizational commitment, Ley's (2019) study is relevant to the present research. Ley's results support the idea that workplace learning initiatives have a positive impact on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The study specifically highlights the positive connection between intrinsic learning motives and work attitudes, although no interaction effect between intrinsic learning motives and learning experiences was detected. This adds to the developing comprehension of the beneficial outcomes of workplace learning programs on employee attitudes.

Insights into informal workplace learning dynamics among blue-collar workers, as

presented by Decius, Schaper, and Seifert (2021), align with the broader considerations of contextual and individual factors in the current study. Adopting an input-process-output perspective, their study emphasizes the influential roles of work characteristics and workers' characteristics in shaping informal workplace learning experiences. This reinforces the importance of considering diverse contextual and individual elements when devising effective workplace learning interventions, particularly relevant for the unique challenges faced by blue-collar workers.

As educational institutions swiftly transitioned to remote learning models in response to the pandemic, educational counselors faced both challenges and opportunities. The integration of technology for counseling services became paramount, requiring counselors to rapidly upskill in virtual communication platforms, online counseling techniques, and digital student engagement strategies (Zaidi & Bhatia, 2020). The sudden shift emphasized the importance of technological literacy in the evolving landscape of educational counseling.

The mental health implications of the pandemic have significantly increased the demand for counseling services in educational settings. Educational counselors have found themselves at the forefront of addressing the emotional and psychological challenges faced by students, educators, and parents alike. The surge in demand for mental health counseling has necessitated specialized training for educational counselors to effectively respond to the unique stressors associated with the pandemic (Szilagyi, 2021; Milić, & Marić, 2022).

The heightened demand for counseling services during the pandemic has also raised concerns about the well-being and potential burnout of educational counselors. The blurred boundaries between work and personal life in remote settings, coupled with the emotional toll of supporting individuals through crisis situations, underscore the need for targeted workplace learning initiatives. Strategies focusing on counselor self-care, resilience, and coping mechanisms have become imperative (Pressley, 2021).

The disruption caused by COVID-19 has prompted a reevaluation of traditional communities of practice for educational counselors. Virtual communities of practice have emerged as an alternative, providing a platform for counselors to share experiences, resources, and coping strategies in the face of new challenges (Szilagyi, 2021). The online collaborative environment fosters a sense of connection and shared learning among educational counselors despite physical distancing.

The move to remote education and counselling has brought to light the existing digital divide among students, with implications for educational counselors. Counselors are tasked with addressing disparities in access to technology and ensuring equitable distribution of counseling services. Workplace learning initiatives need to encompass strategies for counselors to navigate and mitigate the impact of the digital divide on student well-being and academic success (Mielgo-Conde et al., 2021; Cădariu, & Rad, 2023; Cădariu, 2022).

The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the importance of

resilience and adaptability as key competencies for educational counselors. Workplace learning initiatives should prioritize the development of these competencies to empower counselors to navigate uncertainty, implement agile counseling strategies, and contribute to the overall resilience of the educational community (Gouëdard, Pont & Viennet, 2020).

Workplace learning is crucial for the professional development of counsellors. Results from this research, in line with the literature review have highlighted the importance of psychological safety, self-directed learning, and the impact of work and worker characteristics on workplace learning. The findings suggest that creating a psychologically safe environment, promoting self-directed learning, and considering contextual and individual factors are essential for effective workplace learning among

counsellors. However, there are still knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. Future research should focus on exploring learning-oriented leadership from the employees' perspective, investigating specific self-directed learning strategies for counsellors, examining the mechanisms through which workplace learning programs influence work attitudes, and further exploring the role of work and worker characteristics in informal learning among counsellors. By addressing these gaps, we can enhance our understanding of workplace learning for counsellors and contribute to the development of effective learning interventions in this field.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has propelled educational counselors into a heightened state of professionalization, with technology serving as a catalyst for innovation and adaptability. The adoption of technology has not only enhanced individual counseling skills but has also fostered collaboration, advocacy, and a collective commitment to addressing broader societal challenges. As educational counselors adapt to changing workplace dynamics, incorporating technology becomes crucial for their professional growth and impact on society.

5. Conclusions
The study of workplace learning disruption among educational counselors during the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a complex scenario characterized by challenges, innovative responses, and significant outcomes. The diverse range of experiences shared by counselors offers valuable insights that go beyond immediate adjustments, highlighting the evolving professionalization of the counseling role amidst unprecedented disruptions.

The Challenges, Actions, and Results (CAR) framework, derived from the thematic analysis, serves as a guide to systematically analyze the dimensions of workplace learning. As educational counselors grappled with abrupt transitions, their resilience, adaptability, and proactive responses became evident across diverse themes. These responses not only addressed immediate challenges but also exemplified a broader commitment to professional growth, collaboration, and societal impact.

The profound impact of technology adoption emerged as a central theme, reflecting the pivotal role of technological literacy in reshaping workplace learning. The counselors' active engagement in technological training, attendance at webinars, and embrace of new digital platforms showcased their dedication to staying at the forefront of advancements. The integration of technology not only enabled effective online counseling but also marked a significant advancement in the professionalization of educational counselors, showcasing their ability to adapt to the digital age.

The self-directed learning initiatives undertaken by counselors further underscored their commitment to continuous professional development. As they adapted counseling approaches to remote settings, the proactive pursuit of knowledge through online resources, webinars, and collaboration with peers showcased a resilient and innovative response to the evolving demands of their profession. This self-directed learning not only enhanced individual skills but also contributed to the collective knowledge base of the counseling community.

The collaborative nature of workplace learning was exemplified through the theme of virtual communities of practice. Counselors recognized disparities in students' access to technology and, through advocacy and targeted strategies, actively participated in virtual communities to bridge gaps and foster collaboration. This collaborative ethos, facilitated by technology, highlights a shift towards a more interconnected and supportive professional community, reinforcing the counselors' commitment to inclusivity and social impact.

Addressing the digital divide and equity concerns, educational counselors not only

acknowledged disparities in access but actively championed for resources and implemented targeted strategies. Workplace learning initiatives, specifically designed to mitigate the impact of the digital divide, demonstrated a holistic approach towards ensuring equitable access to counseling services for all students. This commitment to social equity aligns with the evolving role of educational counselors as advocates for inclusivity and equal opportunity in the educational landscape.

In navigating the surge in demand for mental health counseling during the pandemic, counselors exhibited a proactive approach, seeking specialized training and collaborating with mental health professionals. The emphasis on well-being, resilience, and burnout mitigation underscored the recognition of the interconnectedness between counselor well-being and the quality of services provided. Targeted workplace learning initiatives focusing on well-being strategies contributed to the development of resilient counselors who can effectively meet the evolving needs of their educational communities.

The conclusions drawn from this study transcend the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic, offering a forward-looking perspective on the evolving role of educational counselors. The integration of technology, the embrace of self-directed learning, and the collaborative ethos evident in virtual communities of practice collectively contribute to the ongoing professionalization of the counseling profession. As educational counselors continue to adapt and innovate in the post-pandemic era, these findings provide a foundation for shaping targeted interventions, policy decisions, and ongoing research endeavors aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and resilience of educational counselors in an ever-changing educational landscape.

In alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being, the findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of educational counselors in contributing to a resilient and inclusive educational environment. The adoption of technology, proactive self-directed learning, and collaborative efforts to bridge the digital divide exemplify the counselors' commitment to fostering equitable access to quality education. By actively engaging in virtual communities of practice and advocating for resources to address disparities in students' access to technology, educational counselors contribute to creating a learning environment that is not only technologically advanced but also socially inclusive. Moreover, their responsiveness to the increased demand for mental health support during the pandemic aligns with SDG 3, emphasizing the importance of mental well-being as a fundamental component of overall health. As educational counselors navigate challenges and innovate in the post-pandemic era, their role becomes integral to achieving the broader aspirations of the SDGs, fostering a transformative and sustainable educational landscape for future generations.

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of educational counselors during the COVID-19 pandemic, several limitations should be considered in interpreting the findings. Firstly, the study's focus on a specific geographical region, western Romania, may limit the generalizability of the results to a broader global context. Cultural and institutional variations may influence workplace learning dynamics differently in diverse educational settings.

Secondly, the sample size, albeit strategically designed for maximum variation, may pose

constraints on the generalizability of findings. The study's emphasis on depth and richness of responses may compromise the breadth of representation across different demographic factors. Additionally, the reliance on a single method, qualitative analysis, may limit the comprehensiveness of the study. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach to triangulate findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of workplace learning disruptions.

Furthermore, the study predominantly captures the perspectives of educational counselors, potentially overlooking the viewpoints of other stakeholders such as students,

parents, or administrators. A more inclusive exploration involving multiple perspectives could offer a holistic understanding of the collaborative dynamics within the educational ecosystem during disruptive periods.

The retrospective nature of the study, relying on counselors' reflections, introduces the possibility of recall bias. Participants may selectively recall experiences, potentially influencing the accuracy and completeness of the information provided. Longitudinal studies capturing real-time experiences could offer a more dynamic and nuanced perspective on the evolving challenges and responses in the rapidly changing landscape of workplace learning.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a foundation for future research endeavors, calling for a more expansive and diverse exploration of workplace learning disruptions. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, researchers can refine methodologies and extend the scope of inquiry, contributing to a more robust understanding of the challenges faced by educational counselors in the post-pandemic era.

6. Future Research Directions
Drawing upon the insights gained from this study, several directions for future research emerge to deepen our understanding of workplace learning disruptions among educational counselors and contribute to the ongoing evolution of their roles.

Conducting comparative studies across diverse geographical regions and cultural contexts would enhance the generalizability of findings. Exploring how workplace learning disruptions manifest in different educational systems and societal structures could provide valuable insights into the global variations and commonalities in the experiences of educational counselors. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to capture the evolving nature of workplace learning disruptions over time. Examining how the experiences of educational counselors change and adapt in the post-pandemic era will contribute to a dynamic understanding of the long-term impacts and transformations in the counseling profession.

Including perspectives from various stakeholders such as students, parents, administrators, and policymakers would offer a more comprehensive view of the collaborative dynamics within the educational ecosystem. Understanding the interplay between different stakeholders during workplace learning disruptions could inform targeted interventions and collaborative strategies.

Integrating qualitative insights with quantitative data through a mixed-methods approach could provide a more nuanced understanding of workplace learning disruptions. Combining the richness of qualitative narratives with quantitative metrics would allow for a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges and responses faced by educational counselors. Investigating the effectiveness of specific professional development interventions in enhancing the resilience and adaptability of educational counselors would contribute to evidence-based practices. Identifying tailored training programs and support mechanisms can empower counselors to navigate future disruptions more effectively.

As technology continues to play a central role in educational practices, future research should analyze the ethical implications of increased technological integration in counseling. Examining ethical considerations, privacy concerns, and potential disparities in technology access will be crucial for the responsible advancement of digital learning environments. Also, exploring diverse models of workplace learning and their impact on counselor effectiveness could guide the development of best practices. Comparative analyses of different approaches to integrating formal and informal learning in virtual and hybrid settings will contribute to evidence-based strategies for optimizing workplace learning experiences.

Investigating the impact of workplace learning disruptions on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes is essential for developing student-centered counseling practices. Understanding how educational counselors can best support students in times of crisis and change will contribute to fostering resilient and empowered learners.

By addressing these future research directions, scholars can continue to advance the field of educational counseling, ensuring that the profession remains adaptive, responsive, and equipped to meet the evolving needs of students and educational communities.

Legislatively, at the national level, one or more stages of implementing the adopted normative acts are followed, while also correlating with other categories of laws that ensure the basis of skills with new technology in educational practices. Particularly important is addressing the ethical implications of this technological integration and the aspect of confidentiality responsibility in research.

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