

Wellbeing Services at a Post-Secondary School in Malta

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Abstract

Most schools in Malta provide excellent wellbeing services through the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the counselling and guidance department, and the teaching staff. However, due to the sensitivity of discussed issues, the flow of related information between them is often limited. This case study explored the perceptions of key stakeholders of a post-secondary school in Malta regarding the usefulness, challenges, and ethical considerations of implementing a Knowledge Management System (KMS) to support the secure and GDPR-compliant sharing of student wellbeing information. This qualitative inductive research involved semi-structured interviews with the national Wellbeing Officer, the Head of School, and the School Counsellor, as well as two focus groups comprising five teachers each. The SECI (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination and Internalisation) model developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi was adopted as the guiding theoretical framework. Thematic analysis revealed three interconnected challenges: inconsistent information flows, concerns regarding professionalism and confidentiality, and the need for structured training. All participants agreed that having access to a GDPR-compliant KMS could enhance early intervention and collaborative support, provided it respects student anonymity and is accompanied by clear protocols. In doing so, this study not only contributes to broader discussions on ethical data sharing in education but also addresses a significant gap in research on post-secondary schools in Malta, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, schools, and future researchers.

Keywords

Confidentiality, Ethical, Professionalism, Sensitive Wellbeing-Related Information, Training

1. Introduction

This study is situated in a post-secondary school in Malta, with a population of 148 educators and 1026 students aged 16 years and older. The school provides education at Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 4, equivalent to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 4, mainly known as Advanced Level (A-level) and Intermediate Level academic subjects. Students enrol voluntarily after completing compulsory schooling. They come from different socio-economic backgrounds and various localities across Malta.

The school places a high commitment on both academic achievement and student wellbeing, recognising that this transitional phase from adolescence to early adulthood can be particularly challenging (MEDE, 2017). It provides holistic support not only through its dedicated Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and teachers, but also through the Counselling and Guidance Department. When students fill in the application to enrol at the school, they are asked to provide information about whether they suffer from any medical conditions, require examination access arrangements, have ever been statemented (that is, diagnosed by a professional psychologist with specific conditions), or suffer from any food allergies.

When a student indicates any of these, an assigned Deputy Head invites them for an informal meeting to gain a deeper understanding of their needs and to explore how the school can provide appropriate support. Should the student provide the information and give consent, the Deputy Head may inform their teachers. However, not all students choose to disclose sensitive information or permit its dissemination. Sometimes information may emerge progressively over the course of the academic year, either when the student seeks help from the Counselling and Guidance Department or when teachers observe signs related to the particular situation, health condition, or psychological state.

Due to the sensitivity of this information, it often remains confined to the educator with whom the student opens up. Hence, some teachers may be aware of medical, psychological, or other conditions that a student brings to class, while others are not. Occasionally, a wellbeing-related incident occurs unexpectedly during a lesson, leaving the teacher surprised and expected to act in the best possible way to help. It is in such moments that frustration arises, with educators questioning why they were left in the dark.

1.1. The Positionality of the Researcher

The researcher has been teaching at the post-secondary school where this study is situated for the past thirteen years. She knows well the school and the evolving needs of students. As an insider, she is well-positioned to identify opportunities for improved collaboration among staff. However, she remains mindful of the potential for bias and commits to adopt a reflexive approach throughout the study.

1.1.1. Ontology

This study adopts a constructivist ontological stance, recognising that knowledge within the school is shaped by the diverse experiences, roles, and interactions of

educational professionals (Akkerman et al., 2021). Reality is understood as context-dependent and socially constructed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), especially in how knowledge is generated, interpreted, and shared among individuals such as SLT, Counsellor, Guidance teachers, and teaching staff. As Willig (2019) suggests, the researcher must remain reflexively aware of her assumptions about what there is to know, and in this study, that includes acknowledging that “multiple realities” (Creswell & Poth, 2018: p. 20) may coexist within the school environment, depending on each stakeholder’s role and experience.

1.1.2. Epistemology

The epistemological position underpinning this research aligns with interpretivism, which assumes that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and social interaction (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This is particularly relevant in exploring how educational stakeholders perceive and interpret knowledge-sharing practices. Willig (2019) emphasises the importance of being conscious of the beliefs one holds about how understanding is formed.

1.1.3. Axiology

This study is grounded in a clear ethical orientation that prioritises respect, empathy, and professional integrity. It values inclusivity and collaboration. In line with the researcher’s professional values and Willig’s (2019) call for awareness of what is meaningful and valuable in human interaction, the study respects confidentiality and student privacy, while seeking to enhance staff collaboration and contribute to holistic student wellbeing.

1.2. Statement of Problem

As highlighted by Falzon et al. (2019), the absence of a systematic approach to data collection and information-sharing between SLT, Guidance and Counselling members and teachers poses a significant challenge. Sometimes, it limits educators from providing holistic support and may reinforce the perception that student wellbeing falls only within the remit of the Counselling and Guidance Department (Falzon et al., 2019). Cauchi et al. (2017) explain that in some cases, teachers often feel unable to respond to wellbeing concerns, or else they argue that they are limited by time constraints, heavy workload, and limited professional training in this area.

1.3. Research Gap

In Malta, studies about the wellbeing of post-secondary students are very limited. At this transition stage of their lives, such studies could better help students beyond academics (Montalto & Chircop, 2023). On the other hand, there exists almost no research about the usefulness of a Knowledge Management System (KMS) that aims to bridge collaboration between different stakeholders with the aim of providing greater wellbeing support. In recent years, KMSs have gained importance in educational settings as tools to enhance institutional memory, pro-

fessional collaboration, and informed decision-making (Chu, 2016). KMSs are structured platforms designed to capture, organise, store, and share knowledge in a way that improves learning, decision-making, collaboration, and institutional learning (Raudeliūnienė et al., 2020). For the purpose of this study, the proposed KMS refers to a secure, GDPR-compliant (GDPR.EU, 2025) digital platform designed to store and share selected student wellbeing-related information among authorised school personnel. The system would include structured data such as documented wellbeing concerns (e.g., medical conditions, psychological needs, safeguarding alerts), anonymised thematic case summaries, and intervention notes. Data entry would primarily be carried out by the School Counsellor and designated members of the Senior Leadership Team, with restricted input permissions for trained staff where appropriate. Access would be role-based, allowing teachers to view only relevant, need-to-know information to support classroom practice. Sensitive records would be stored using a combination of identifiable data (accessible only to authorised personnel such as the Counsellor and HoS) and anonymised or alert-based summaries for wider staff access. The system would not function as a full disclosure database, but as a controlled information-sharing tool to support early intervention while maintaining strict confidentiality protocols.

1.4. Aims of the Study

This case study aims to explore and compare the perceptions of the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, School Counsellor, and ten teachers regarding the benefits and challenges of a KMS for enhancing collaboration between the SLT, Counselling and Guidance Department and the rest of the teaching staff to foster greater wellbeing among students.

1.4.1. Research Objectives

- 1) To explore the perceptions of key stakeholders on the usefulness of a KMS in facilitating the dissemination of information related to students' medical, psychological, and wellbeing status, with the goal of enhancing collaboration between the SLT, School Counsellor, and teaching staff to promote greater student wellbeing.
- 2) To identify the perceived benefits and concerns surrounding the implementation of a GDPR-compliant KMS.
- 3) To compare stakeholder perspectives in terms of feasibility and ethical considerations for implementing such a KMS.

1.4.2. Research Questions

- 1) How do the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, School Counsellor, and teaching staff perceive the usefulness of a Knowledge Management System for facilitating the dissemination of information related to students' medical, psychological, and wellbeing status, with the goal of enhancing collaboration to promote greater student wellbeing?

2) What are the perceived benefits and concerns related to implementing a GDPR-compliant KMS?

3) How do stakeholder perspectives differ regarding the feasibility and ethical implications of introducing a KMS?

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework chosen to guide this mini-study is the SECI model (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, and Internalisation), developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), who later expanded it to the Phronesis Model. This model describes how knowledge is created and converted between tacit (such as professional expertise and experiential insights of educators and support staff) and explicit forms (policies, procedures, and academic data) within organisations (Oranga, 2023).

The SECI model proceeds in four major steps. The first one is socialisation that refers to the sharing of tacit knowledge through direct interaction and shared experiences. The second step is externalisation that involves documenting or recording tacit knowledge into explicit format. This is done by observing and writing down detailed descriptions of procedures, or by filming, recording audio, or other appropriate formats. The third step of the SECI model is combination. This is the process of systematising different pieces of explicit knowledge into structured formats such as databases, handbooks, or digital knowledge repositories (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The fourth and final step is internalisation which involves individual users accessing explicit knowledge and utilising it into their own tacit understanding, often through applying it in practice, as further explained in the next chapter.

2. Literature Review

2.1. System Analysis

2.1.1. Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management (KM) refers to the process of collecting, organising, and sharing knowledge to improve performance, decision-making, and collaboration within an organisation. In the context of school counselling, KM can enable more effective use of insights gathered from interactions with students, whether through referrals, session notes, or behavioural observations. It can also ensure that valuable knowledge is not lost when staff are absent, retire, or are deployed. Novita et al. (2019), for example, propose a KM-based system for storing and retrieving counselling information in an Indonesian school, where data collected from teachers and counsellors was input into a centralised digital system.

2.1.2. Organisational Learning

Effective knowledge sharing also encourages collaboration and innovation (Novita et al., 2019). A key benefit of KM is its ability to support organisational learning. Cheng et al. (2024) suggest that when professionals exchange knowledge, especially the tacit kind that is not usually written down, it can fuel creativity and improve-

ment. This has clear relevance in school counselling, where informal observations, “gut feelings”, and practical know-how often shape how cases are managed.

However, translating this into practice can be difficult. Cultural norms in Maltese schools often favour privacy and professional silos. As [Falzon et al. \(2020\)](#) note, counsellors in Malta frequently report feeling disconnected from broader school teams. Encouraging staff to share what they know, especially if it’s sensitive, requires trust, time, and a supportive environment ([Bettman & Digiacomio, 2022](#)). [Ahmad and Karim \(2019\)](#) argue that when staff feel included in decision-making and knowledge flows, job satisfaction improves. But for this to happen, schools must foster a culture that values collaboration over hierarchy. [Cheng et al. \(2024\)](#) also recommend that schools develop a roadmap for implementing KMS, broken into manageable short-, medium-, and long-term goals.

2.1.3. The Phronesis Model

The Phronesis Model ([Figure 1](#)) ([Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995](#)), as updated from the SECI model, explains how knowledge is created and shared through four key stages: socialisation (sharing personal experiences informally), externalisation (turning insights into written guidance), combination (merging various sources of information), and internalisation (applying what is learned in practice). This is being used as the theoretical framework that supports this study.

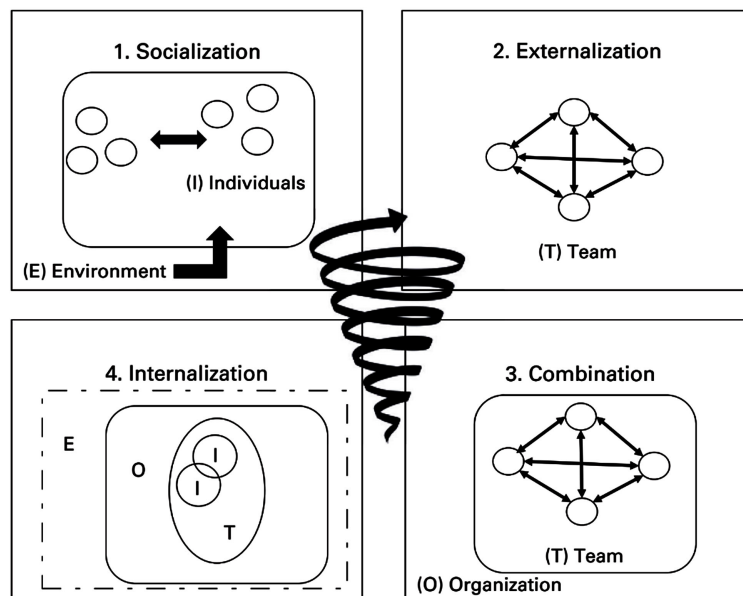


Figure 1. The phronesis model ([Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995](#): p. 66).

In a school counselling context, this might involve counsellors discussing patterns of student behaviour, documenting common issues, combining this data with academic records, and then training teachers to respond more effectively ([Novita et al., 2019](#)). This ongoing process helps turn individual experiences into shared organisational learning, ultimately improving student support. The spiral in the model represents continuous knowledge growth, where knowledge is regularly eval-

uated, refined, and updated as it moves through different levels of the organisation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), in this case, the school.

2.2. Cultural and Environmental Contextualisation

The organisational culture of the Counselling and Guidance Department in Maltese post-secondary schools is influenced by several socio-cultural and structural factors. These include the different qualification requirements between counsellors and guidance teachers, job descriptions of the different grades, confidentiality obligations, and the unique characteristics of the Maltese islands, being so small with most of the people knowing each other (Cauchi et al., 2017) (Figure 2).

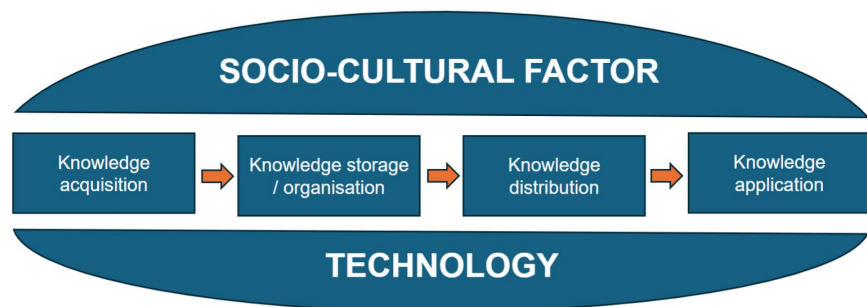


Figure 2. Socio-cultural factors and technology influencing KMS (adapted from Le Dinh & Dam, 2021).

In the school under study, the Counsellor is the only member of the department with formal training in counselling or psychology. The guidance teachers are typically appointed following the sole requirement of at least five years of classroom experience (Cauchi et al., 2017). Furthermore, according to a directive issued by the Malta Union of Teachers on the 9th June 2021, guidance teachers are not obliged to provide any statistical data to school management: “The MUT is hereby directing all Guidance Teachers in State schools to refrain from collecting or submitting any statistics” (MUT, 2021: para. 1, 2023: para. 1). As Schein (2004) suggests, organisational culture is sustained not just by formal roles, but by implicit norms and shared practices. The MUT directive restricts flow of information, especially between the guidance teachers, SLT, and the national Wellbeing Officer. The cultural dynamic is even more complex due to limited human resources. Cauchi et al. (2017) explain that due to the shortage of counsellors in schools, every counsellor must oversee a number of schools, carry out counselling, documenting data, co-ordinating processes and eventually train the guidance teachers too.

2.2.1. Confidentiality

Sivis-Cetinkaya (2020) and Camadan et al. (2021) explain how trust is a fundamental value in counselling and guidance. Students need to trust these professionals to feel comfortable enough to share their sensitive wellbeing-related information. But this need for privacy can make it hard for school staff to share knowledge that could actually help students.

Confidentiality is even more trivial in small islands like Malta and Gozo, where

everyone knows each other (Falzon et al., 2020). Counsellors might be very cautious as not to leak any wellbeing-related information with the fear that someone might be a relative or have close connection with the student in question and might unintentionally leak information that may come to the students' or their relatives' attention. This coincides with what Harries and Spong (2017) describe in their study, that counsellors admitted often feel like they cannot speak freely at school. In a separate study, Lamont-Mills et al. (2018) explain that sometimes counsellors face the dilemma of what are the limits of confidentiality and data protection.

Harries and Spong (2017) and Lamont-Mills et al. (2018) propose clear ethical guidelines that indicate when to share information, especially if a student is at risk. Another idea is using technology wisely.

2.2.2. Lack of Structured Knowledge-Sharing Practices

Novita et al. (2019) explain their study, which involved the introduction of a KMS in a school. They document improved and standardisation of processes. However, more technical solutions and a strong cultural shift were fundamental for its success. All staff engaged in increased collaboration. As Schein (2004) and Gutterman (2024) affirm, for organisational culture to ameliorate, all members have to prioritise values, beliefs, and norms that shape daily practices. Furthermore, transformational leadership is essential in navigating such shift. Fullan (2013) and Yoserizal et al. (2024) both point out that leaders must model transparency, foster trust, and engage all stakeholders in co-creating new practices. Mullins (2016) further underscores the importance of considering the emotional and psychological readiness of individuals undergoing change. To guide this transformation, Kotter's (1995) 8-Step Change Model offers a structured framework: it begins by creating a sense of urgency around the need for improved student support, then builds a guiding coalition of key stakeholders, and establishes a clear vision for ethical and collaborative knowledge-sharing. Communicating this vision effectively, empowering staff through training and role clarity, and celebrating early successes are crucial to maintaining momentum. Sustained progress relies on feedback and continuous improvement, while long-term success depends on embedding these values into the school's culture, policies, and professional development practices (Chu, 2016). In this way, a KMS becomes more than a tool. It becomes part of a renewed professional identity rooted in collaboration and shared responsibility (Novita et al., 2019) for student wellbeing.

2.3. Process and Responsibility Mapping

Raudeliūnienė et al. (2020) propose that for knowledge to contribute to institutional learning and effectiveness, it must undergo a series of coordinated stages: acquisition, storage, sharing, application, and evaluation. Leadership support, training, and a clear framework for ethical information sharing are essential to guide process and responsibility mapping (Yoserizal et al., 2024). Stakeholders, while actively participating in the design of a KMS, need to know well their role and document and eval-

uate every step of the process. As Novita et al. (2019) highlight, KM is not merely a technical exercise, but an organisational strategy aimed at ensuring the right knowledge reaches the right individuals at the right time. This enables collaboration, informed decision-making, and continuous improvement in service delivery. Moreover, Novita et al. (2019) argue that KM is a vital enabler of innovation, as it channels human creativity into organisational learning.

2.4. User-Level Micro-Application

Senior Leadership Team, the School Counsellor, guidance teachers and all teaching staff are the primary end-users of the KMS. This system can mitigate the issue highlighted by Falzon et al. (2020) that despite being in daily contact with students, teachers often remain unaware of underlying personal or social issues that could affect classroom engagement. Sammut (2016) further asserts that while teachers perceive the knowledge held by counselling and guidance professionals as highly valuable, they lack formal channels through which they can receive or request such knowledge.

3. Methodology

3.1. Single Case Study

This mini-study involves a single case study within a post-secondary school in Malta. The research strategy involves an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of educational stakeholders regarding the implementation of a KMS that supports collaboration between the SLT, Counselling and Guidance Department, and teaching staff. Schock (2019) argues that a single case study is appropriate when analysing a phenomenon within its real-world context, drawing on multiple sources of evidence.

3.2. Theoretical Research Design

The study employed qualitative methodologies to explore the research questions comprehensively. An inductive approach was adopted through focus groups and interviews, allowing themes to emerge from stakeholder perceptions without relying on predefined hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2012). Inductive reasoning was used to interpret how professionals understand their roles, ethical responsibilities, and communication challenges regarding student wellbeing. As Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) explain, the interpretivist paradigm enables researchers to access context-specific knowledge by eliciting meaning from participants' lived experiences. This was especially relevant to the study's focus on ethical and emotional complexity in information sharing, where depth of insight was prioritised over generalisability (Creswell, 2009).

3.3. The Research Tools

This study utilised two primary qualitative tools: focus groups with teachers, and semi-structured interviews with the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, and School Counsel-

lor. These instruments were selected to enable open-ended exploration of participants' views, allowing them to describe experiences in their own words. The flexibility of these tools facilitated depth and authenticity in the data collected (Cohen et al., 2018; Robson & McCartan, 2016).

The interview and focus group guides were designed to align closely with the research questions and objectives of the study. Prompts explored participants' experiences of how wellbeing-related information is currently documented, stored, and communicated within the school, as well as their perceptions of existing gaps in information-sharing practices. Participants were also invited to reflect on the potential implementation of a Knowledge Management System (KMS), including its perceived usefulness, benefits, challenges, and ethical implications, particularly in relation to confidentiality and GDPR compliance. Example prompts included questions such as: "How is wellbeing-related information currently documented and shared within the school?" and "What are your views on the potential benefits and concerns of implementing a GDPR-compliant digital system for sharing such information?". The guides were reviewed by the research supervisor to ensure clarity, relevance, and ethical sensitivity, and minor refinements were made prior to data collection. This ensured that the data collection tools were fit for purpose and capable of eliciting rich, context-specific insights.

3.4. Sampling Framework and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to select the Wellbeing Officer, as he was best positioned to provide valuable insights into national-level processes related to counselling and guidance within Maltese state schools. This approach was also applied in selecting the HoS and school counsellor, as they were the only individuals in leadership roles capable of offering detailed, context-specific information about how the Counselling and Guidance Department operates within the case study school.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit the teaching staff. An email invitation was sent to all teaching staff at the school, outlining the purpose and scope of the research. The first ten teachers who expressed interest and were available at a mutually convenient time, when they were free from teaching duties, were selected to form two focus groups. The ten participating teachers represented a range of subject areas, including biology, psychology, music, sociology, philosophy, maths, physics, economics, drama, and English language. Their teaching experience ranged from early-career educators to those with over ten years of experience. Some participants also held pastoral or mentoring roles within the school, providing additional insight into student wellbeing beyond academic instruction.

Guidance teachers were not included in this study due to both structural and contextual considerations. In the Maltese educational context, guidance teachers are qualified teachers who typically assume additional pastoral responsibilities after a minimum of five years of teaching experience, often alongside a reduced teaching load (Cauchi et al., 2017). As such, their role partially overlaps with that of teaching staff included in this study. Furthermore, in line with directives issued by the

Malta Union of Teachers (MUT, 2021, 2023), guidance teachers are not obliged to collect, document, or share certain forms of student-related data. Given that this study specifically explored perceptions related to the documentation and sharing of wellbeing-related information, the researcher took an ethically cautious approach not to recruit guidance teachers, so as to avoid placing them in a position that could be perceived as conflicting with these directives. While their perspectives would have provided valuable insights, this decision ensured alignment with local professional regulations. Their inclusion is therefore recommended for future research under conditions that clearly address these constraints.

3.5. Qualitative Data Analysis

Data from both semi-structured interviews and focus groups were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis. An interpretivist, inductive lens guided the analysis, enabling the researcher to derive insights grounded in participants' lived experiences. Initially, the two datasets were coded separately to preserve the distinct perspectives of leadership participants (Wellbeing Officer, Head of School, and School Counsellor) and teaching staff. Transcripts were read multiple times to ensure familiarisation with the data, and initial codes were generated manually using colour coding to capture meaningful patterns.

Following this, codes from both datasets were compared and iteratively refined through a process of constant review, allowing for the identification of patterns of convergence and divergence across participant groups. These codes were then organised into broader categories, which were subsequently developed into three overarching themes. Theme development involved a recursive process of reviewing, defining, and naming themes to ensure internal coherence and clear distinction between them.

To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by sharing summarised interpretations with all participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their perspectives. In addition, an audit trail was maintained throughout the analytical process, documenting coding decisions, theme development, and reflexive notes. This process contributed to the transparency, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.6. Strategies for Integration

A sequential exploratory design guided the integration of data sources. Semi-structured interviews with leadership figures were conducted first to explore their perspectives, followed by focus groups with teachers to understand how these perspectives align or diverge from classroom-level experiences (Creswell & Plano, 2011). This sequencing enabled analysis by layering perspectives.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from IDEA College, where the researcher is currently pursuing this doctoral programme, as well as from the Ministry for Educa-

tion, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), the Head of College Network, and the Head of School. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Interviews were conducted in a safe and respectful environment, and care was taken to formulate questions sensitively so as not to offend or distress participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. Data were managed in line with GDPR, with only essential, non-identifiable information retained. The study did not present any moral or physical risk to participants, nor did it result in any competitive or financial disadvantage to the institution where the research was conducted.

3.8. Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher's dual role as a teacher and researcher necessitated critical reflexivity. Personal assumptions and potential biases were acknowledged and managed through bracketing techniques (Habibullah et al., 2023). Reflexive journaling and peer discussions supported ethical decision-making and data interpretation. The study integrated introspective, epistemological, and methodological reflexivity (Darwin Holmes, 2020).

Given the researcher's dual role as both a teacher and researcher within the same school, particular care was taken to minimise potential power dynamics and social desirability bias during recruitment and data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and invitations were communicated in a neutral and non-coercive manner, emphasising that non-participation would have no professional implications. Focus groups were conducted in a supportive environment that encouraged open dialogue, with participants reassured that their responses would remain confidential and would not influence professional relationships within the school. Throughout the process, the researcher adopted a non-evaluative stance and remained reflexively aware of how her positionality could influence interactions and interpretations.

3.9. Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness

Reliability was ensured through consistent use of interview and focus group protocols, audio recordings, and verbatim transcriptions. Member checking and systematic coding supported credibility. Validity was strengthened through expert review of tools and reflexivity (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Trustworthiness, rather than statistical generalisability, was achieved through thick description, enabling readers to assess relevance to their contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4. Results

4.1. Theme 1: Inconsistent Information Flows

All participants argued that they are not sufficiently informed about the various wellbeing-related issues that their students carry. The Wellbeing Officer, who is

in charge of all counsellors and guidance teachers in Maltese state schools, admitted not receiving all the information he requests due to various reasons. He also noted that guidance teachers are not required to document data for statistical purposes, referring to a directive issued by the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT):

“This directive has been in place for five years. Therefore, as the Wellbeing Officer, all I can do is collect statistics from the counsellors based on the work they carry out. I am not permitted to collect data related to the work of the guidance teachers. This leaves me in a difficult situation when I am asked to answer parliamentary questions, for example” (Wellbeing Officer).

The HoS admitted not knowing about all cases at her school. Likewise, the School Counsellor explained she is only aware of cases involving students who seek her service, and individual teachers are usually aware of cases from students who confide in them directly.

“Usually, I m informed directly by the student... In the eight years I ve been teaching here, I was only informed by the SLT twice” (Teacher 1, Focus Group 2).

When asked whether there is a policy that guides processes of Counselling and Guidance Departments, the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, and the School Counsellor acknowledged that there is no formal policy or Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in place. The School Counsellor explained:

“The school does not have its own specific policy but follows national policies that apply to all schools in Malta, such as those on child abuse, substance abuse, and inclusion. In more serious or complex cases, such as harassment or cyber-crime, the school may consult the lawyer or involve the cyber police” (School Counsellor).

A consequence of inconsistent information flow was elaborated upon by nine out of ten teachers. They provided different examples when they felt limited in their ability to support students effectively due to a lack of information, such as when a teacher learned about a student’s bereavement of his mother through social media posts. Other examples included a student having an epileptic seizure in class, which caught everyone by surprise, and another student suffering an asthma attack without access to her medication, resulting in hospitalisation. Additional examples involved students with colour blindness who could not distinguish colour changes in chemical reactions during Biology and Chemistry practicals. Another teacher recounted a case when a diabetic student was stopped from using her mobile phones during a lesson, by the uninformed teacher, when she was checking her blood glucose levels through an app. One teacher reflected:

“We have a school policy of no use of mobile phones if not authorised during lessons. But we are not aware of students who monitor their blood glucose levels through an app installed in their mobile. What do we do—allow everyone to use their mobile, just in case?” (Teacher 5, Focus Group 1).

Likewise, another teacher described an episode when he denied a student from

eating during a lesson, resulting in the latter fainting due to hypoglycaemia, leaving the teacher feeling stunned and confused. This teacher asked whether he could just break the school's policy of no eating and drinking during lessons in case there are diabetic students of whom he is not aware.

Such contributions highlight the fragmented nature of information flow in the absence of a formal system. Participants agreed that a GDPR-compliant KMS would enable more effective support.

4.2. Theme 2: Professionalism and Confidentiality

One teacher strongly argued that teachers, like other professionals, should be trusted not only with thematic or anonymised information, but also with specific details, particularly in cases involving medical conditions:

“If doctors, psychologists, and counsellors are considered professionals that should know of medical or psychological conditions of students, even us teachers are professionals, and yes, we should know” (Teacher 3, Focus Group 1).

However, there was no consensus to this. Some asserted that not all professions act professionally, and some may use the information in an unethical way. A teacher reminded about the teachers' code of ethics and legal obligations to uphold sensitive information with due diligence.

The School Counsellor acknowledged and empathised with teachers' concerns about being inadequately informed. She explained that the Maltese Islands are so small, with people in villages and towns knowing each other, that it could be very easy for information to leak in an unethical way. She described how, sometimes teachers refer students and later they ask her about the outcomes of their meeting. However, she is legally bound not to disclose private information, which leaves some teachers disappointed.

From the teachers' perspective, additional concerns were raised regarding the documentation of sensitive data. Some teachers asked whether sensitive information concerning wellbeing-related issues of students is documented in a KMS, which could later be accessed by external entities such as banks, courts, or employers, if requested. The researcher asked this question to the Wellbeing Officer, School Counsellor, and HoS. They all firmly denied this possibility, ensuring that such data is never shared externally. To support this, the Head of School provided a policy document titled *Implementation of a Retention Policy for the Records Created and Managed by the Further Education Institutions within the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE)*, which confirms that wellbeing records are retained for five years and are not transferred to the National Archives.

4.3. Theme 3: Training

A major concern that emerged during the interviews and focus groups was the lack of adequate training at all levels. The first issue was that there is a shortage of school counsellors. In 2017, there were 35 counsellors and trainee counsellors supporting 162 state schools. As of this year, the number has dropped to just 15 in

state schools 10 counsellors serve 52 church schools. Each school counsellor is responsible for overseeing multiple schools and organise training for guidance teachers.

“I provide guidance teachers with training myself and also bring in experts to help broaden their knowledge base” (School Counsellor).

The shortage of counsellors is significant not only in view of high demand for wellbeing support within schools, but also in terms of organising training for all school staff. Teachers complained that they rarely receive training on wellbeing-related issues. They referred to appreciating a particular Continuous Professional Development session during which the School Counsellor addressed the staff following a students’ suicide. They expressed a desire for more sessions led by the School Counsellor. Teachers explained that knowing about wellbeing-related cases alone is not sufficient if they are not trained in how to support such students.

One of the concerns of teachers supporting a KMS was also their lack of knowledge in handling and inputting sensitive data, raising questions about what is considered ethical and necessary information to include in such a KMS.

“What to input? What to leave out? What is ethical inputting?” (Teacher 4, Focus Group 1).

Others feared that reliance on digital systems could weaken human relationships. This concern reflected a broader desire for interpersonal support strategies over digital mechanisms.

Some teachers also showed concern about assuming added responsibilities if asked to input data into a KMS, or access it to inform themselves and learn from it. They argued that they might not be adequately trained or supported. The Wellbeing Officer expressed the need for training, but also the need for mutual trust and professional development across all levels of staff. He added that such a system would have to be endorsed by the Ministry of Education and the union of teachers. Without this, the Wellbeing Officer feared that the system might not be adopted uniformly:

“In Malta, training and SOP have to be imposed. Otherwise, it won’t happen” (Wellbeing Officer).

5. Discussion

5.1. Main Themes

5.1.1. Theme 1: Inconsistent Information Flows

Findings from this study concur with Falzon et al. (2019) that in Maltese schools, different educators have access to different parts of the information. They concluded that this fragmentation leads to an inability to provide holistic support when information is either absent or insufficient. A GDPR-compliant KMS could provide a structured mechanism for transforming fragmented, tacit knowledge into accessible, role-appropriate information, thereby enhancing coordinated support for students.

Another point raised under the theme of inconsistent information flow was the absence of clear policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). [Dalkir \(2023\)](#) warns that without mechanisms in place to preserve and transfer knowledge, especially the tacit type, schools risk losing valuable insights that could otherwise support students in the future, especially when key personnel leave. This concern aligns with what [Falzon et al. \(2019\)](#) observed regarding the lack of a systematic approach to data collection and information-sharing.

5.1.2. Theme 2: Professionalism and Confidentiality

As described by [Falzon et al. \(2020\)](#), the small size of the islands of Malta and Gozo, and the close personal ties within villages and towns, make it very easy for information, especially related to student wellbeing, to circulate beyond intended boundaries if not carefully managed. Because a considerable number of people within a town or village are related, friends, or somehow know each other, while often offering a source of social support, it can also increase the likelihood of breaches of privacy, even if unintentional. This context emphasises the importance of reminding the teachers' code of ethics and practice ([Legislation Malta, 2012](#)), providing regular confidentiality training, and developing digital systems that restrict access to sensitive data based on role-specific needs. As [Sivis-Cetinkaya \(2020\)](#) and [Camadan et al. \(2021\)](#) assert, such measures are crucial for safeguarding student trust and ensuring that wellbeing support is delivered ethically and securely.

This tension between professional respect and legal limitations was another point raised by the participants. [Sivis-Cetinkaya \(2020\)](#) and [Camadan et al. \(2021\)](#) underline the importance of protecting student trust, while [Harries and Spong \(2017\)](#) and [Lamont-Mills et al. \(2018\)](#) argue that there should be ethical guidelines allowing for responsible and purposeful information sharing among staff. [Bettman and Digiacomo \(2022\)](#) also highlight how essential it is to navigate these decisions with sensitivity, and when needed, and to consult external supervisors to make sure the right procedure is respected.

5.1.3. Theme 3: Training

Training emerged as a key concern throughout this study. Teachers repeatedly emphasised that simply receiving information about students' conditions is not enough. Without proper training, they felt unprepared to respond appropriately to psychological or medical episodes. During both focus groups, several described real-life incidents where they were caught off guard when a student experienced a health or emotional crisis. This reflects findings by [Gunawardena et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Cauchi et al. \(2017\)](#), who highlight that even experienced educators may feel unprepared without proper training.

The call for training was not without hesitation. Some teachers expressed scepticism about the practicality of digital solutions like a KMS, especially if these systems replaced rather than complemented the human relationships they valued in pastoral care. Training, they stressed, needs to be meaningful, scenario-based, and

part of an ongoing professional development framework, not a one-off Continuous Professional Development (CPD) session. This point aligns with literature by Cheng et al. (2024) and Mullins (2016), who argue that professional learning must be embedded in a supportive organisational culture.

In the context of this study, this means training must be supported by transformational leadership (Fullan, 2013) and emotional readiness for change (Kotter, 1995). Teachers need to be confident not only in their understanding of student wellbeing issues but also in their ability to act appropriately. Effective training must therefore go beyond technical or theoretical knowledge. It must include ethical literacy, data protection awareness, relational competencies, and confidence in using digital tools.

5.2. Linking to the Theoretical Framework

The theme of inconsistent information flow can be very well discussed through the lens of the SECI model. Currently, the lack of policy and SOP to guide the work of the Counselling and Guidance Department limits how knowledge is captured and shared. While verbal exchanges do occur and satisfy the socialisation phase of the SECI model, much of the tacit knowledge remains undocumented, which fails the SECI model because knowledge is not available to be shared through explicit usable forms (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This is hindering the combination phase that involves merging individual contributions into an organised knowledge base (Cheng et al., 2024). Hence, this further inhibits the internalisation phase of the SECI model, where learning is not occurring through recorded formats that teachers can apply in practice. Without this step, important insights learned by years of experience remain locked in individuals rather than becoming part of the school's collective learning. A well-designed KMS could facilitate this process by offering secure and structured ways to document and share knowledge, such as anonymised case summaries or thematic insights, without compromising student confidentiality (Weed-Schertzer, 2020).

Furthermore, Cheng et al. (2024) argue that the successful integration of KMS in education requires not only technical infrastructure but also professional training and a readiness among staff to embrace cultural change. This aligns with the internalisation phase of the SECI model, which only occurs when educators trust the KMS, understand how to use it, and believe in its value for improving student wellbeing (Oranga, 2023).

To address these challenges gradually, the school could adopt a phased roadmap, just as Cheng et al. (2024) suggest. Short-term goals could involve using a shared digital template for counselling records. Mid-term actions could include anonymised data reviews in pastoral or staff meetings. Long-term strategies could involve embedding KMS tools and practices into the school's policies and professional learning frameworks. Over time, such efforts could support more coherent information flows, facilitate training, reduce duplication of effort, and ensure more timely and consistent support for students.

5.3. Answering the Research Questions

5.3.1. Perceived Usefulness of a Knowledge Management System

All participants in this study: the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, School Counsellor, and teachers, expressed support for the hypothetical introduction of a KMS. While their reasons varied, the shared consensus was that the current fragmented flow of information significantly hinders the desired timely and more effective support to students.

5.3.2. Perceived Benefits and Concerns of a GDPR-Compliant KMS

Participants identified a number of benefits that a GDPR-compliant KMS could offer. These included retention of information when experienced staff members leave the school, improved continuity of care, better information flows across SLT, Counselling and Guidance Department and teachers, enhanced training opportunities, and more informed decision-making. Particularly, the potential to store and share anonymised, theme-based data for professional development was seen as a strength. Teachers believed this could empower them to respond more confidently to students' needs, while the Wellbeing Officer and HoS valued the ability to access up-to-date overviews of school-wide trends.

Among the concerns, issues related to confidentiality, data protection, and professional conduct emerged especially because in small islands like Malta and Gozo, where most people know one another, the risk of information leakage is high, as noted by Falzon et al. (2020). The HoS stressed the importance of role-based access restrictions and strong policy frameworks to ensure ethical information-sharing. Teachers also showed concern about assuming added responsibilities for which they might not be adequately trained or supported. The Wellbeing Officer expressed that such a system would have to be approved by the Ministry for Education and the teachers' union, along with professional training to all educators.

5.3.3. Perceptions of Wellbeing Officer, HoS, and School Counsellor as Compared to the Perceptions of Teachers

Stakeholder perspectives varied in relation to the feasibility and ethical implications of introducing a KMS. The Wellbeing Officer and HoS perceived the initiative as both feasible and necessary, provided it is developed gradually, in consultation with stakeholders, and embedded within broader policy frameworks. The School Counsellor highlighted the ethical and legal complexities involved stressing preserving student trust.

Teachers presented more concerns. While many called to be treated as professionals and to be informed about medical and other students' conditions, they also stressed about the importance of training to be able to support them in eventualities when they need help. Others voiced concern about the ethical boundaries of their role. Several feared that without appropriate safeguards and adequate support, a KMS could result in them being expected to perform duties for which they are not formally trained.

5.4. Practical and Policy Implications

This study contributes to the limited Maltese literature on the implementation of KMS in education by offering insights by key stakeholders. Such research can inform a much-needed policy that guides wellbeing data management at this post-secondary school. A GDPR-compliant KMS, guided by clear policy or SOP, endorsed by the Ministry of Education and union of teachers, may offer a practical way forward. However, successful implementation would depend on a phased approach that involves educators at all levels in the co-design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of the system. As Dalkir (2023) notes, KM is not just a technological innovation but a strategic, cultural, and relational shift. Thus, this study recommends that future KMS designs in education should not only meet technical and legal criteria but also reflect the cultural realities of this post-secondary school.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Main Findings

This mini-study explored how key educational stakeholders in a Maltese post-secondary school perceive the potential use of a KMS to enhance collaboration and support student wellbeing. Three core themes emerged from the data: inconsistent information flows, professionalism and confidentiality, and the need for training.

Findings show that information about students' wellbeing, medical, or psychological needs is fragmented between the SLT, the Counselling and Guidance Department, and teaching staff, and different stakeholders either have information pertaining to different students, or no information at all. The Wellbeing Officer, who co-ordinates all counsellors and guidance teachers in Maltese state schools, also admitted not receiving all the desired information. This fragmentation limits the ability of leaders and teachers to respond in a timely, informed, and coordinated manner. The lack of standardised procedures for recording or communicating such information in a GDPR-compliant way was identified as a major obstacle.

The study also revealed concerns around the professional handling of sensitive information. While most participants called for greater trust and access to relevant student data, the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, and the Counsellor highlighted the legal and ethical limits imposed by data protection laws. The small size of the Maltese community further complicates this issue, as confidentiality breaches are more likely in tight-knit villages and towns.

The theme of training was strongly emphasised. Teachers expressed a desire for structured support and practical training that would help them respond confidently to students' health or wellbeing crises. Many felt that without training, simply knowing about a student's condition could lead to uncertainty rather than clarity. There was also agreement that any digital solution, such as a KMS, must be embedded in a culture of professional learning and not replace the human relationships central to student support.

Together, these findings suggest that while there is general support for a KMS, its successful implementation would require clear policy, ongoing training, and a strong educators' ethical conduct that respects students' sensitive information.

6.2. Research's Contributions

This mini-study makes several key contributions to local literature about wellbeing of students in a post-secondary school, and also about KMS in education. It offers original insights into the perceptions of multiple stakeholders, namely the Wellbeing Officer, HoS, School Counsellor, and teaching staff, regarding the feasibility, usefulness, and ethical considerations of implementing a GDPR-compliant KMS at the post-secondary level. It uses the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) to demonstrate how tacit knowledge could be converted into explicit knowledge that can be shared to improve operational practices, in this case, related to providing wellbeing-related support to students. Furthermore, the study addresses a gap in local research concerning the systemic barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration, concerning sensitive wellbeing-related information of students, in schools. By highlighting issues such as inconsistent information flows, the complex balance between professionalism and confidentiality, and the lack of training, this research provides an evidence-based rationale for the introduction of a secure and ethically governed KMS tailored to the specific needs of the Maltese post-secondary school. Furthermore, this research explored the perceptions of key stakeholders on how their responsibilities could be better supported through structured systems and training. In doing so, the study provides practical recommendations that can inform school decision-making and professional training planning.

Overall, the study provides a foundation for further research and policy innovation in the field of student wellbeing, while offering a context-specific proposal for the development and implementation of KMS in a Maltese post-secondary school.

6.3. Practical Recommendations

A central recommendation is the gradual development and piloting of a GDPR-compliant KMS within the school. The system should be designed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Ministry for Education, the Malta Union of Teachers, SLT, Counsellor, guidance teachers, and teaching staff. This KMS should allow for secure, role-based access to anonymised student wellbeing data and thematic case summaries, helping educators identify patterns and respond more effectively.

The school should also adopt a policy or SOP for data collection, storage, and information-sharing among staff. This policy must align with legal requirements while providing ethical and practical guidance on how to handle sensitive information in the school.

The school should also provide more training focusing on ethical information-sharing, confidentiality, psychological first aid, training according to different cases,

and the identification of early warning signs of distress. Training should include practical scenarios relevant to local school settings and be delivered by professionals, and complimented by the KMS, in collaboration with the Counsellor.

Although this study focused on the perspectives of educators, it is equally important to involve students in the process. Their views on how their information is used and how confidentiality is maintained can provide valuable insights that strengthen trust in any new system. These recommendations offer a path forward in addressing fragmented information flows and enhancing collaboration among school staff, with the ultimate goal of improving student wellbeing in this post-secondary school.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into stakeholder perspectives on implementing a GDPR-compliant KMS in a Maltese post-secondary school, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study was based on a small sample size, involving a Wellbeing Officer, HoS, the School Counsellor, and two focus groups of five teachers each. While the qualitative design allowed for in-depth exploration, the insights generated reflect the specific experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Secondly, although every effort was made to ensure openness and honesty during interviews and focus groups, participants may have responded cautiously due to the sensitive nature of discussing confidentiality, ethical practices, and school's limitations. Social desirability bias may have influenced how some views were articulated.

Thirdly, the study did not include the perspectives of students, parents, or external professionals such as psychologists or social workers. Their input could have provided a more holistic understanding of the implications of implementing a KMS within the wider educational and wellbeing ecosystem.

Despite these limitations, the study offers an important contribution to the discourse on ethical information-sharing and professional collaboration in a Maltese post-secondary school and lays the groundwork for future research and policy development.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Studies

This mini-study opened several avenues for further exploration, particularly concerning the integration of KMS in educational settings to enhance student wellbeing. While the current research focused on the perceptions of a selected group of educators within one post-secondary school, future studies include a wider range of participants, such as parents, students, school psychologists, and IT administrators, to gain a more holistic understanding of how a KMS might influence wellbeing-related communication and data handling across the school ecosystem.

Furthermore, while this study explored perceptions at a single point in time, longitudinal research could track the impact of KMS implementation over time, eval-

uating how practices, attitudes, and student outcomes evolve as educators and administrators adapt to new systems and protocols.

6.6. Towards a Culture of Ethical Knowledge Sharing

This study explored how key educational stakeholders in a Maltese post-secondary school perceive the potential of a Knowledge Management System (KMS) to enhance collaboration and support student wellbeing. While participants broadly recognised the value of such a system, their perspectives highlighted a critical tension between the need for improved information-sharing and the ethical responsibility to safeguard sensitive student data.

Rather than viewing a KMS as a purely technical solution, the findings suggest that its effectiveness depends on a broader cultural and organisational shift. Structured information-sharing must be supported by clear ethical guidelines, role-specific access protocols, and sustained professional development that equips educators with the confidence and competence to act appropriately.

Through the lens of the SECI model, this study illustrates how fragmented tacit knowledge within schools can be systematically transformed into structured, accessible forms that support collective understanding and more coordinated responses to student needs. However, this transformation requires not only technological infrastructure, but also trust, professional accountability, and alignment with national policies and union directives.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of a KMS in this context is not simply a matter of introducing a digital platform, but of fostering a professional culture grounded in ethical responsibility, collaboration, and continuous learning. If carefully designed and supported, such a system has the potential to strengthen early intervention, enhance staff preparedness, and contribute meaningfully to student wellbeing in post-secondary education.

Declaration

This empirical study was carried out by myself as part of my doctoral dissertation. I came up with the concept, design, carried out data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. I drafted the manuscript, which was corrected by my supervisor and reviewed by a blind reviewer from IDEA College, where I study.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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