

Guidance and Counseling in Schools

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Abstract—This paper discusses the need for counseling services in schools in a holistic manner in line with the current era of globalization and the industrial revolution. Guidance and counseling services are important aspects of the school system. Counseling services are not just for students who are involved in disciplinary issues, but also for the positive development of individuals. To be effective counselors in helping students, especially in this era of globalization, counselors need current knowledge in the field of counseling. In Malaysia, most school counselors have been trained in a special counseling training program. Most counselors who are providing counseling services in high school have a first degree (Bachelor's) in the counseling field and some even specialize further with a Master's. In line with the Malaysian Counselor's Act (Act 580), many of the school counselors have been registered with the Board of Counselors to practice professionally. Schools have also been providing counseling services to students at the primary school level. This paper discusses career planning, cross-cultural competencies, family counseling, drug abuse and crisis intervention as important aspects that must be mastered by school counselors in providing better services to students. Generally, guidance and counseling services provided in schools will promote the personal, educational, and career development of all students.

Keyword—*guidance and counselling, counselors, counselling system*

I. INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counseling services are important aspects of the school system. Counseling services are not just for students who are involved in disciplinary issues, but also for the positive development of individuals. Counseling is a professional relationship involving two or more individuals in which a counselor helps clients in adjusting or solving their personal issues. Gladding [1] stresses that there has been no generally accepted definition on counseling for years. According to the 20/20 vision for the future of counseling group lead by Kaplan and others, counseling is defined as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals [2].

School counselors provide counseling programs in areas such as academic, personal development, career, and drug prevention programs. Other than focusing on academic and career issues, counseling and guidance

services in schools help students resolve emotional and personal issues or behavioral problems. In some cases, family counseling can also be conducted when the counselor assumes the problem to stem from home. Counseling services help students develop a clearer focus or sense of direction in their life. Therefore, effective counseling programs are essential to the school system to provide a conducive learning environment that will improve student achievement.

Counseling services in Malaysia have been recognized as an essential factor in the development of our nation, especially in the area of human capital. Counseling in Malaysia has also grown through the course of time [3,4] being recognized as a professional profession after the commencement of the Counselors Act 1998. Thus, professionalism in counseling education is expected in all institutions offering a counseling program.

II. PROFESSIONALISM IN SCHOOL COUNSELING

A professional profession requires systematic knowledge and skill through study, training, and experience. As a professional person, one will need to exercise the knowledge and enhance skills ethically as an expert. Professionals also follow a code of conducts to keep the morale of the profession high. Engelkes & Vandergoot [5] suggested that in order to be a professional, one should get standard training from an institution that has been recognized by a specific professional body. In addition, the profession should be acknowledged by a specific law of the country. The enactment of the Counselors Act 1998 clearly supports the existence of professional counselors in Malaysia. The activities of a professional counselor in Malaysia are regulated by the Board of Counselors (Malaysia) through licensing, code of conducts, and disciplinary actions.

At this moment, training for counseling programs in Malaysia includes university degrees at the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate levels. At the Master's level, some universities are focusing on specialization on specific issues such as drugs, addiction, and family. Generally, counseling programs in Malaysian higher learning institutions are designed to prepare individuals for a variety of counseling services for children, adolescents, and adults. Graduates can work with

government agencies, non-profit organizations, corporations, and private practices. In order to become a registered counselor, one should enroll in any counseling programs that have been recognized by the Malaysian Board of Counselors.

Bachelor's degree programs in this field are based on curriculum standards governed by the Board of Counselors (Malaysia). Basically, counseling programs at Bachelor level comprise a minimum of 81 components of counseling courses that include core and elective courses, practical training or practicum, and internship. Meanwhile, the Master's degree program must contain a minimum of 48 credit hours of courses in the field of counseling (Board of Counselors, Malaysia). In general, the development of the curriculum has been following guidelines by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in the United States.

In Malaysia, most counseling and guidance teachers or school counselors in schools have been trained in a special counseling training program. Most counselors who are providing counseling services in high school have a first degree (Bachelor's) in the field of counseling with some specializing further with a Master's. In line with the Malaysian Counselor's Act (Act 580), many of the school counselors have been registered with the Board of Counselors to become a professional counselor. At present, counseling services are also being made available to students at the primary school level.

III. WHY DO WE NEED COUNSELORS IN SCHOOLS?

Before we go further, let us discuss why we need counselors in our school system. In order to conduct counseling programs, we need those who have been trained in counseling programs to conduct the programs. Normally, in school, we call this personnel as school counselors. The main reasons why we need counselors in schools include:

A. Student Support

Generally, school counselors help students for academic, career and social issues by relating educational agendas to their success in the future. Counselors will stimulate student motivation in their learning and facilitate students in achieving their ambitions through career development programs. Most importantly, counselors help students deal with any psychological or emotional issues they may face, whether at school or at home. This can be done through individual counseling. In addition, if there is a problem involving several students, a group counseling session can be arranged to help the students involved. In some cases, parents will be called to the school to help

counselors deal with specific issues involving their child's behavior.

B. Parent/Teacher Support

Counselors also provide counseling services and support to parents in schools. In several cases, counselors act as consultants to parents on how to deal with their children's behavior. School counselors have information about issues and challenges students face in school. Nevertheless, counselors are not supposed to share this information directly to other teachers due to confidentiality issues. However, counselors can share certain information with teachers when it helps the students. For example, counselors can remind teachers that there are several students in the school that need more personal attention due to family problems or sharing with teacher personalities issues of the students. Counseling sessions will only succeed when the student receives full support from the whole system. Counselors can also discuss with teachers concerning personality and career choices of students. Therefore, when they teach, they can also connect suitable career choices with their students' personalities.

C. Administrative Support

School counselors must work together with the school's administration. This is to ensure that all school counseling programs and academic missions are in line to promote student accomplishment. Prevention programs conducted in schools help students to be more responsible individuals which reduce problematic and behavioral issues in schools. This promotes a better learning environment for all students; hence, students are happy when they come to school. In fact, several studies have indicated that guidance and counseling services are crucial in the school system [6]. These include:

- 1) School counselors are able to develop and implement both prevention and intervention programs for youths at risk.
- 2) Children who are experiencing family problems report being helped by school counselors.
- 3) School counselors help connect the family as a whole to the educational process.
- 4) School counselors have proven effective in preventing students from committing suicide.
- 5) School counseling programs have a significant influence on disciplinary problems.
- 6) Research indicates that school counselors are effective in teaching social skills.
- 7) Students who have access to counseling programs reported being more positive and having greater feelings of belonging and safety in their schools.
- 8) School counselors are very effective in assisting children in the area of career

development.

- 9) Counselors are effective in assisting high school students with college choices.

IV. CAREER COUNSELING

Career planning can be described as the process through which students make decisions related to their career [7]. In fact, career counseling includes all activities associated with career choices over one's life span [8]. Choosing the right career path is becoming increasingly important for school students today. Therefore, career guidance and counseling play an important role in supporting the transition from school to career or tertiary education. For example, in Malaysia, school counselors assist students in selecting the most appropriate field for their studies after finishing their Form Three evaluation. Normally, when students select a program of study or enter streaming, they may not have all the information about courses needed in that program. Students are given the opportunity to enroll in technical and vocational training, pure science programs or social science related programs. Counselors will look at each student's personality, motivation, and academic achievement in order to help them choose the most suitable career path for their future.

The career counseling process provides directions that best aligns with a student's strengths, interests, and passion. Currently, vocational and technical training is seen as an effective bridge between school and work, and home and society. Career counseling programs also prepare students to enter colleges or tertiary education in proper ways.

Overall, career and guidance counseling programs should involve activities such as:

- 1) organizing career awareness programs
- 2) providing information to students about careers
- 3) helping students choose specific subjects related to their program of study
- 4) basic resume writing for high school students
- 5) interview preparation
- 6) providing career-related information to students
- 7) conducting career-related activities in the classroom
- 8) career planning and advice to students and parents

V. DRUG ABUSE

Drug abuse is a broad and complex problem that affects the lives of many people in the world. Drug abuse continues to be a major problem all over the world and Malaysia is no exception to this drug problem. Drug prevention has been conducted in schools as part of the Malaysian government's effort in preventing drug abuse among school students or teenagers in Malaysia. According to Qiu, Cai, Gregory,

Chee, Hoang, and Rozainee, there has been increasing accounts of illegal substance abuse among university students and professional groups in Malaysia in recent years. In Malaysia, school counselors work closely with the National Anti-drugs Agency to provide an awareness program about the dangers of using drugs. It is important for counselors to develop awareness programs on drug hazards in early schooling.

United Nations (2004) suggested that the educational components of a school drug abuse prevention programme should include a safe and supportive school environment. It is important that all parties involved in the prevention program are aware of the policies and procedures involved. To make the program a success, we need cooperation from all parties that include not only counselors but also school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, related professionals, agencies and the local police.

Among programs that can be conducted by counselors in school are conducting talks or seminars on drug abuse, and distributing posters or brochures related to the danger of drugs abuse. School counselors may also invite personnel from anti-drug agencies to share their knowledge about drugs and the dangers of its misuse on one's life. Counselors can also invite former drug addicts who have successfully recovered from their drug addictions to share their experience with students regarding the dangers of drug abuse.

VI. PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Generally, social skills are the skills we use to interact with each other and act appropriately in social settings. Social skills are very important for all students in order to survive in this new millennium and to have successful functioning in life. Therefore, most guidance programs in school will emphasize programs that help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect themselves and others. Other than communicational skills, social skills also include leadership skills and problem-solving skills.

Some activities that can increase social skill among students include group counseling, communications training, assertiveness training, leadership training, and public speaking. All these activities can be conducted in the school or at a campsite outside the school. The National Association of School Psychologist [9] emphasize that social skills will promote positive behavior, academic success, and school safety. The National Association of School Psychologist [9] also suggested some benefits of good social skills that include:

- 1) positive and safe school environments

- 2) child resiliency in the face of future crises or other stressful life events
- 3) students who seek appropriate and safe avenues for aggression and frustration
- 4) children who take personal responsibility for promoting school safety

Meanwhile, students with poor social skills have been shown to:

- 1) experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships with parents, teachers, and peers.
 - 2) evoke highly negative responses from others that lead to high levels of peer rejection; peer rejection has been linked to several occasions of school violence.
 - 3) show signs of depression, aggression, and anxiety.
 - 4) demonstrate poor academic performance as an indirect consequence.
 - 5) Show a higher incidence of involvement in the criminal justice system as adults.
- [9]

VII. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES/SPECIAL NEEDS

Special needs students require more guidance and attention compared to ordinary students in schools. Schools counselors, too, play an important role in supporting the personal/social, academic and career development among students with disabilities. However, not all counselors are competent enough to provide guidance and counseling services to students with a disability or this special population. Anctil and Bauman [10] stressed that school counselors who are knowledgeable about the factors that influence students and their family's response to disability are better prepared to meet their educational needs. Meanwhile, preparation of counselors to serve children with disabilities requires the clarification of the counselors' feelings and attitudes about working with students who have disabilities, as well as the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills [11].

Interestingly a study by Saimi and Amat [12] about the readiness of school counselors in providing services to special education programs found that counselors have a positive perception of special needs with a high level of readiness to carry out counseling services to special needs students. However, they also suggested that additional training should be acquired to strengthen the counselor's skills in conducting counseling services for special needs students.

VIII. COUNSELING THE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Touron, Touron & Silvero [13] stressed that gifted students are generally different from their normal peers in several developmental aspects such as physical, psychomotor, emotional, intellectual, and social

domains. Abu Yazid stated that gifted students are challenged with more affective and psychological issues than normal students [14]. In term of counseling services, Neihart [15] stated that gifted students normally seek counseling services to discuss their own giftedness and people's perceptions towards that giftedness. They also discuss how to cope with the stress of growing up as gifted children. Previous studies also indicate that school counselors are not well equipped with skills and knowledge on how to deal with these gifted and talented students. Most importantly, school counselors need to provide consultations in helping parents understand the options they have in our educational system and make appropriate decisions about education planning for their children.

IX. CRISIS INTERVENTION/MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOL

Incidents of school disasters or violence have been growing abroad. In fact, Studer and Salter [16] suggested that disturbing school events have the potential to erupt in schools at any time.

In general, the frequency of violent occurrences or disasters in this country (Malaysia) can be considered very low. Several studies indicate that school counselors are key individuals in addressing violence prevention activities and addressing issues concerning crises intervention. These crises include suicide, assassination, natural disaster or death of a student or teacher in school. When any of these crises hit the school, many lives are disrupted at once. It is crucial for the school counselors to examine their competence level in dealing with any crisis situation.

According to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) position statement, "the professional school counselor's primary role is to facilitate planning, coordinate response to and advocate for the emotional needs of all persons affected by the crisis/critical incident by providing direct counseling service during and after the incident" (2007).

Several steps can be taken to prepare school counselors should they be faced with a crisis. Counselors should attend basic courses on crisis intervention management and complete more training in the intervention process for further advancement. As for the basic knowledge to be properly prepared for a crisis, school counselors at least need to be aware of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its association with exposure to a traumatic event [16]. Kline, Lichtenstein, and Schonfeld [17] stated that any crisis not only presents dangers to the individual's mental health but also provides an opportunity for psychological growth and development of those involved.

ASCA's position statements concerning crisis management also suggest several important crisis preventions and responses involving school counselors, including:

- 1) individual and group counseling
- 2) advocacy for student safety
- 3) interventions for students at risk of dropping out or harming self or others
- 4) peer mediation training, conflict resolution programs, and anti-bullying programs
- 5) support of student-initiated programs such as Students Against Violence Everywhere
- 6) family, faculty and staff education programs
- 7) facilitation of open communication between students and caring adults
- 8) defusing critical incidents and providing related stress debriefing
- 9) district and school response team planning and practices
- 10) partnering with community resources

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position (2013).

X. MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING COMPETENCIES

Understanding the different cultural backgrounds of our clients is crucial to effectively work with clients from diverse backgrounds, especially in school. The combination of counseling skills, theoretical approaches, and multicultural competencies will help counselors acquire the necessary skills in engaging diverse clients. Choudhuri, et al. [18] stress that all helping professionals have developed standards and ethical guidelines that affirm a commitment to addressing and respecting diversity. Professional counselors are asked to appreciate diversity and to adopt a cross-cultural approach that is sensitive to cultural contexts. The American Counseling Association [19] has stated;

“Counselors maintain awareness and sensitivity regarding cultural meanings of confidentiality and privacy. Counselors respect differing views toward disclosure of information. Counselors hold ongoing discussions with clients as to how, when, and with whom information is to be shared”.

Sue and Sue [20] define multicultural counseling and therapy as both a helping role and process that uses modalities and defined goals consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of their clients. A client is perceived not just as an individual, but as an individual who is a product of his or her social and cultural context. In early 1982, Sue and others developed an initial construct of multicultural competency.

Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, and Stadler [21] further explained and operationalized these fundamental competencies that emphasized three aspects which include awareness, knowledge, and skill. This document (Operationalization of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies) can be considered as essential reading for all counselor trainees. However, further study is vital in ensuring the suitability of the multiculturalism domain (developed in the west) for other cultures. It is important to develop an awareness of ourselves, in the context of our own aspects of social identities, and to pay attention to our own cultural and socio-political foundation [18]. Arredondo et al. [21] stressed that culturally skilled counselors believe cultural self-awareness and sensitivity to one's own cultural heritage is essential in becoming a competent counselor.

XI. CONCLUSION

Counseling services in school are not just for students who are involved in disciplinary issues, but also for the positive development of individuals. School counselors provide services that help students develop their personalities, education, and career development. Counselors must act as agents of change to the school system. This will change students' negative perceptions about counseling services. Counselors should also enhance their knowledge and skills about counseling for special populations such as special needs students as well as gifted and talented groups. Other than that, counselors should also prepare themselves to address any crises that may occur in their school. In brief, effective counseling programs are essential to the school system in providing conducive learning environments that will improve student achievement and their social skills.

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