

Students Perception Differences in Individual Counseling Services in Terms of Counselors Communication Skills Based on Gender and Grades in Junior High Schools Throughout Semarang City and Regency

Abstract

Individual counseling services which are not in line with the procedures and goals may lead to students' negative perceptions. To know this there are several indicators to examine whether the services have been in line with the procedures or not, such as listening skills, techniques used, goal setting, and others. Regarding these preliminary findings, this study aimed at describing students' perceptions of individual counseling services provided by guidance and counseling teachers in Semarang city and regency. Survey method with cross-sectional technique (n=709) was employed to investigate this issue. The findings showed that according to gender, male students had lower perceptions of the individual counseling given by the guidance and counseling teachers than female students. Further, differences in perceptions based on grades are also discussed in this article.

Keywords: perception, individual counseling, student

Introduction

Guidance and counseling teacher is a profession that has professional standards. These standards cover basic skills and techniques in conducting counseling based on theoretical and practical frameworks to establish a good relationship, advance to work phase, gain assessment and termination (Ridley, Kelly, & Mollen, 2011). Counseling skills and techniques are various, but there are basic skills to accomplish in the beginning of counseling process, namely microskills. The skills usually consist of active listening skills, and will be considered as a determinant factor in the development of counseling processes (Kuntze, Van Der Molen, & Born, 2009). The purpose of basic listening and interviewing skills is to help establish a relationship between the guidance and counseling teacher and students (clients), encourage clients' disclosure, and provide services based on clients' needs. (Ridley et al., 2011).

There are many competencies counselors should have. One of which is empathy conceptualizations. Some of empathy conceptualizations emphasize relationship with compassion, while the other conceptualizations emphasize clients' perspectives, and focus on how to attentively "listen" to clients' experiences (Clark, 2004). Notions of empathy identify them as improvable skills through trainings, while others see as automatic reactions or innate quality that may or may not be subject to further development beyond what is innately (Gerdes, Segal, & Lietz, 2010; Singer & Lamm, 2009)

Ability to empathize, listen, provide comfort, techniques mastery, gain achievement and knowledge, as well as goal orientation are aspects which can stimulate students' perceptions of a guidance and counseling teacher in the process of individual counseling services (Messina, 2005). The way the guidance and counseling teacher performs the individual counseling services shapes students' perception of him.

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The data is complete, it has the demographical data as well (male, female, and grades). So, why don't use a stronger statistical analysis?

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Individual counseling is a process where a client enters a relationship therapy with a well-trained counselor who creates safe, humane, secret and professional atmospheres to build an environment to explore the client's feelings, beliefs, and behaviors with the aim of covering client's understanding about himself, and others, organize client's reality, and client's goals as well as proceeding to a better direction indicated by changes (Eremie et al., 2012). The aim of this service for students is to help them be independent, responsible, creative, productive, and honest people so that they can optimally develop.

During the individual counseling process, students need comfort to express their problems, appreciation and respect, and openness to the guidance and counseling teacher so that there will be a supportive atmosphere and relationship to achieve counseling goals. To gain such desired objectives, there is a need for the guidance and counseling teacher to master communication skills. Communication skills mastery is the basis of counseling. Knapp (2007) asserts that micro-skills facilitate client's understanding which in turn function as a basis for all assistances. Client's understanding is realized by therapeutic awareness gained from clients' statements and the way they deliver the statements. For more, regarding interviewing skills and the main theoretical strength that underlie counseling and therapy activities, Ivey, D'Andrea, Ivey & Simek-Morgan, (2009) state that counselors are expected to implement strategies that reflect a high sense of intentionality.

The most basic macroskills cover behaviors showing counselor's presence to listen clients are such as eye contact, body language, vocal quality. Once the counselor shows his presence, he proceeds to microskills hierarchy to open and closed questions, give encouragement, paraphrase, summation, feelings reflection, confrontation and other skills. It is important to keep in mind that the foundation for effective interview and skills integration is the ability to listen and understand clients (Ivey & Ivey, 2008).

Counseling is also called as a process of helping, and has two main skill categories. First, communication and action skills or skills that involve external behavior. Second, mental skills or skills that require internal thinking process (Nelson & Jones, 2009).

Counseling microskills are divided into two. First, listening skills, including: clarification, paraphrase (responding to content), reflection (responding to feelings), and summarizing. Second, influencing skills, such as open and closed questions, advanced interpretation and empathy, information giving, immediacy, self-disclosure, and confrontation (Cormier, Nurius, & Osborn, 2009).

A counselor must have good communication skills so that his counseling can run effectively. These skills are important in counseling because they provide understanding for counselees. To control this service quality, competency standards should be used to examine the extent that has been achieved and further expectation for performance development.

Furthermore, a counselor is also demanded to have personal competencies. Cavanagh (1982) mentions personal competencies that must be owned by a counselor, namely good self-understanding, competent in counseling, healthy personality, trustworthy, honesty, responsive, patient, and having sensitivity towards counselee.

These competencies help counselees or clients have good perceptions. Perception is a process that is initially started by sensing as a response of accepting stimulus related to the received messages or information by individuals (Walgito, 2010).

It is important to know students' perception of the guidance and counseling teacher in individual counseling services because the information giving by students depends on their high and low perceptions. Once students consider the relationship they build within a counseling service is good, it would contribute positive results to the success of counseling (Bell, Hagedorn, & Robinson, 2016; Norcross & Lambert, 2011). The role of the guidance and counseling teacher or school counselor is significant to the success of school counseling services, but previous study revealed that students have not yet felt satisfied with the school counseling given by the guidance and counseling teacher. (Kartiko, Hartati, & Saraswati, 2014).

Many previous studies examined the assessment of guidance and counseling teachers' competencies and skills in providing individual counseling services. Kuntze et al. (2009) found that counselors who have been working gain higher scores than university students who are still learning competencies and skills in providing services. Their study used communication skills progress test (CSPT) instrument distributed to counselors and university students. Another study gained insignificant differences in competencies and skills seen from gender. Their study used communication skills mastery scale (Bakkar, 2019). Faturokhman states that one problem that happens in individual counseling might caused by incomprehensive knowledge about communication skills (counseling interview) by guidance and counseling teachers or counselors. In fact, the mastery of communication skills is the basis of counseling. (Fatchurrahman, 2016).

Some studies of guidance and counseling teachers' competencies and skills in providing individual counseling have been conducted. To be objective, study study intended to assess guidance and counseling teachers based on students' perspectives as counselees. It was because the effectiveness of counseling processes can be seen from counselees' satisfaction.

Studies on students' perceptions of individual counseling regarding their satisfaction during the services actually have ever been conducted. Those studies show that the level of students' satisfaction in having individual counseling at SMP Negeri 1 Kebomas Gresik based on r effective value on students' perceptions variable and individual counseling services gained 45.69% satisfaction, while the rest 54.31% are influenced by other factors (Erawati, 2015). On the other hand, this study intended to find out students' perceptions of the individual counseling services in relation to the guidance and counseling teachers or counselors' competencies and skills in counseling processes seen from gender and grades in Junior High School (SMP) throughout Semarang city and regency.

Methods

This study involved 709 SMP students grades 7, 8, and 9 in Semarang city and regency in Central Java province. The sample was taken using simple random sampling. Survey method with cross-sectional was involved to collect data of the sample. For more, the instrument used was The Client's Evaluation of Counselor Behavior Short

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Form (CECB-S) developed by (Messina, 2005) consisting of 29 items with 7 answer choices (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neutral, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7; strongly agree). Of 29 items, there were 22 valid items used in this study. In addition, one of seven indicators of the instrument, namely: a) listening, empathy and skills; b) technique; c) goal setting; d) achievement; e) availability; f) action; and g) knowledge) got eliminated due to the results of pilot project by 50 respondents, namely the knowledge indicator. Its validity and reliability levels gained ($r = 0.276 - 0.777$), and cronbach's alpha: 0.923 respectively. Then, to know students' perception of the implementation of individual counseling by the counselors, multidimensional descriptive analysis with the help of statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS 22) was used.

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Results and Discussion

The calculation results of the survey of the students in Semarang city and regency are presented in the table 1.

Table 1 shows that the male students who had low perceptions were 108 people (15.2%), while those who had high perceptions were 153 people (27.9%). Next, female students who had low perceptions were 198 people (21.6%), while those who had high perceptions were 250 people (35.3%). Moreover, according to grades there were 79 students (11.1%) having low perceptions, and 206 students (29.1%) having high perceptions at grade 7. Further, at grade 8, there were 103 students (14.5%) having low perceptions, and 77 (10.9%) students having high perceptions. The last, grade 9 students who had low perceptions amounted to 124 people (17.5%), while those who had high perceptions amounted to 120 people (16.9%).

The Table 2 statistical data show that the dimension of listening, empathy and skills got low perception from 116 male students (16.4%), and high perception from 145 (20.5%) male students. Meanwhile, there were 214 (30.2%) female students having low perception, and 234 (33%) female students having high perception. Based on grades, grade 7 had 90 students (12.7%) having low perception, and 195 students (27.5) having high perception. Further, grade 8 had 109 students (15.4%) having low perception, and 71 students (10%) having high perception. The last, grade 9 had 131 students (18.5%) having low perception, and 113 students (15.9%) having high perception.

The second dimension deals with students' perceptions of the techniques used by the guidance and counseling teachers in individual counseling services. Based on the table it is known that there were differences in the number of students' perceptions based on gender. First, the high perception from female students amounted to 238 people (33.6%), while male students amounted to 146 people (20.6%). Second, the low perception from male students amounted to 115 people (16.2%), while female students amounted to 210 (29.6%) people. In addition, based on grades, the highest perception was gained by grade 7 with 200 students (28.2%), followed by grade 9 with 113 students (15.9%), and grade 8 with 71 students (10.0%).

The third dimension is goal setting. According to the overall calculations, more than 50% of students had high perceptions of the goal setting performed by the guidance and counseling teachers in individual counseling services. There were

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differences in the number of students' perceptions based on gender. First, the high perception from male students amounted to 164 people (36.8%), while female students amounted to 252 people (63.2%). Second, the the low perception from male students amounted to 97 people (13.7%), while female students amounted to 196 people (27.6%). In addition, based on grades, the highest perception was gained by grade 7 with 201 students (28.3%), followed by grade 9 with 131 students (18.5%), and grade 8 with 84 students (11.8%).

The fourth dimension is achievement. It is related to the way the guidance and counseling teachers have orientation to students' achievement. In this dimension, the researchers found that female students who had high perceptions amounted to 247 people (34.8%) or higher than male students' perceptions which amounted to 141 people (19.9%). Meanwhile, at low level of perceptions of this dimension, there were 120 male students (16.9%), and 201 female students (28.3%). For more, based on grades the highest perception was gained by grade 7 with 181 students (25.5%), followed by grade 9 with 134 students (18.9%), and grade 8 with 73 students (10.3%).

In terms of availability dimension, male students who had low perceptions of individual counseling services amounted 129 people (18.2%), while those who had high perceptions amounted 160 people or 22.6%. On the other hand, female students who had low perceptions of availability dimension amounted to 190 people or 26.8%, while those who had high perceptions amounted to 258 people or 36.4%. Then, based on grades, at grade 7 the number of students who had low perceptions were 121 people with a percentage of 17.1%, while the students who had high perceptions were 164 people or 23.1%. At grade 8, the number of students who had low perceptions were 105 people with a percentage of 14.8%, while the students who had high perceptions were 75 people or 10.6%. The last, grade 9 had students with low perceptions of 140 people with a percentage of 19.7%, and students with high perceptions of 104 people or 14.7%.

Data of students' perceptions of individual counseling services in the dimension of action revealed that according to gender, male students who had low perceptions amounted to 101 people with a percentage of 14.2%, while the ones with high perceptions were 132 people or 18.6%. Further, female students who had low perceptions amounted to 190 people or 33.4%, while the ones with high perceptions were 211 people or 21.8%. Based on grades, there were 78 students or 11.0% having low perceptions, and 207 students or 29.2% having high perceptions at grade 7. At grade 8 there were 94 students or 13.3% having low perceptions, and 86 students or 12.1% having high perceptions. The last, at grade 9 there were 119 students or 16.8% having low perceptions, and 125 students or 17.6% having high perceptions.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine the level of students' perceptions of the guidance and counseling teachers in individual counseling services. As mentioned earlier in the background of the study, students' perceptions influence the success of the individual counseling services. Besides, this study also analyzed the differences in male and female students' perceptions, and based on the data instrument more than half of respondents had high perceptions of the guidance and counseling teachers in the

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individual counseling services. Overall, female students gained higher perceptions than male students.

The findings of this study are in line with the results of previous study by Anyawu & Kitonga (2019) that students have good perceptions of counselors in individual counseling services. However, their study was done using quantitative approach and did not investigate the differences in perceptions seen from gender aspect. In relation to the findings, it could be said that the students had good perceptions of the guidance and counseling teachers' performance in conducting the individual counseling services proved by the high average of students' perceptions.

Individual counseling services have an important role in the school guidance and counseling activities so that the services require competent school counselors in performing this counseling. The results of previous studies conclude that students' perceptions of individual counseling can contribute positive effects for students, namely individual counseling features students to form the attitude of interpersonal relationship, and facilitate psychological helps. As a results, students who experience these issues tend to look for professionals who are able to maintain good interpersonal relationships (Anyanwu & Kitonga, 2019).

When students have good perceptions of the guidance and counseling teachers' performance in the individual counseling services, their interest in utilizing this counseling to facilitate self-development and problem solving covering personal, social, study or career matters will increase. Therefore, school counselors have high expectations for themselves, students, school and educational system (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). Hence, the success of an educational system and students lies in how guidance and counseling teachers maximize their competencies in providing an assistance service. It is because the purpose of counseling at school is to improve student's achievement (ASCA, 2015).

This study is in line with Mau, Li & Hoetmer (2016) who found that practices that school counselors done has been in accordance with the national model and the best practice by ASCA (2012) that is school counselors are involved in the implementation of counseling services, advocacy, collaboration, and design of service program components activities. The findings also revealed that the individual counseling is conducted by the Junior High School guidance and counseling teachers in Semarang city and regency, although there still found some students having low perceptions of counselors' competencies in the individual counseling services. This might be due to the limited time available at school for guidance and counseling teachers to provide individual counseling services to students so that not all students can experience individual counseling services.

This study is inseparable from the limitations. The first limitation in this study was related to the one unused indicator in the instrument, so the future studies are expected to use other instruments that have high validity and reliability. The second limitation dealt with the closed questions in the instrument that could not deeply discover obstacles in the process of individual counseling. The third was related to the lack of theoretical basis in form of previous studies with the topic of students' perceptions of guidance and counseling teachers' competencies, and skills in individual

counseling. Therefore, the future studies are suggested to conduct studies related to students' perceptions and satisfactions in the services of individual counseling.

Conclusion

By referring to the data analysis of gender and grades, it can be concluded that the individual counseling conducted by the guidance and counseling teachers has been running well, although there were some not optimal perceptions. It was evidenced by the low percentages gained by some indicators, such as in the availability dimension which got low perception from the female students and students at grade 8 and 9.

It is suggested to the guidance and counseling teachers to improve the individual counseling services, specifically to further clarify the counseling goals and how the counseling processes will be carried out so that the counseling process will lead to the determined goals. Then, the teachers also need to find or identify any weaknesses in providing the individual counseling services so that the services will be better in the future.

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Table 1. The Level of Students' Perceptions based on Gender and Grades

Categories	Gender						Grades			
	Male		Female		7		8		9	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Low	108	15.2%	198	21.6%	79	11.1%	103	14.5%	124	17.5%
High	153	27.9%	250	35.3%	206	29.1%	77	10.9%	120	16.9%

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of Individual Counseling Services per Indicator

Indicators	Categories	Gender						Grades			
		Male		Female		7		8		9	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Listening, empathy and skills	Low	116	16.4%	214	30.2%	90	12.7%	109	15.4%	131	18.5%
	High	145	20.5%	234	33.6%	195	27.5%	71	10.0%	113	15.9%
Techniques	Low	115	16.2%	210	29.6%	85	12.0%	109	15.4%	131	18.5%
	High	146	20.6%	238	33.6%	200	28.2%	71	10.0%	113	15.9%
Goal Setting	Low	97	13.7%	196	27.6%	84	11.8%	96	13.5%	113	15.9%
	High	164	23.2%	252	35.3%	201	28.3%	84	11.8%	131	18.5%
Achievement	Low	120	16.9%	201	28.3%	104	14.7%	107	15.1%	110	15.5%
	High	141	19.9%	247	34.8%	181	25.5%	73	10.3%	134	18.9%
Availability	Low	129	18.2%	237	33.4%	121	17.1%	105	14.8%	140	19.7%
	High	132	18.6%	211	29.8%	164	23.1%	75	10.6%	104	14.7%
Action	Low	101	14.2%	190	26.8%	78	11.0%	94	13.3%	119	16.8%
	High	160	22.6%	258	36.4%	207	29.2%	86	12.1%	125	17.6%

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