



Professional Identity of Middle School Counsellors in East Java, Indonesia, and the Development Efforts

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The development level of professional identity of guidance and counselling officers in public middle schools is the main research problem in this study. The quantitative descriptive research design using a survey method. Two data collection instruments were developed which were analyzed descriptively and the results were compared. The results show that there are level differences between self-perceptions obtained through instrument one and an assessment based on performance scale inventory obtained through instrument two. Based on these results, it is discussed the possible causes are discussed and level differences and their impact on service quality and the relationship between psychological assisting professions and other school personnel. Those issues mentioned above are discussed with the contribution of the idea on how the solution strengthens the professional identity of school counsellors from pre-service education, practice to organizational.

Keywords: *profession, professional identity, school counsellors, Indonesian counsellors*



Introduction

The professional identity of school counsellors has been the warmest theme of discussions among counselling professionals in the United States (USA). Ambiguity leads to a role conflict that focuses on studies in two polar themes, namely: philosophical and professional (Coppock, 2012). The general question is whether the school counsellor is basically a counsellor (in the sense of a psychological counsellor) who works in a school setting or an educator, namely a teacher who uses counselling skills at work. Webber in 2004 conducted a study of 247 school counsellors in New Jersey about how they define themselves and describe their professional identity. The results showed that 78% of the officers described themselves as counsellors working in the school environment, and 18% identified themselves as teachers implementing counsellor skills. Thus, there are more than three quarters of school counsellors identifying themselves as counsellors, not as teachers. Regarding how school counsellors spend their time at work, in the first and second job rank functions (combined) found 88% for document/non-counselling work, 64% for academic counselling, 49% for personal counselling, 44% for college planning and career, 23 % for class guidance, and 7% for crisis intervention. In the second study, Mascari in 2005 collected qualitative data from school counsellors representing 33 cross-district schools and demographics in New Jersey. This study found a variety of caseloads and the use of counsellor time as well. Nearly 40% of the counsellor's time is spent on non-counselling assignments. A large percentage of non-counselling assignments in both studies, even though there was a decrease in activity not the core of the repeat study, it requires refocusing the role of the school counsellor (Webber, 2006).

The description of situations in the development of school counselling in the USA and the findings regarding its professional identity cannot be fully used to describe the situation in the world of school counselling in Indonesia, because school counsellors in the USA are different from those in Indonesia historically and its status. In the USA, psychological counselling services have developed to be one of the divisions of the American Psychological Association (APA). Psychological counsellors are psychology graduates who work in the school environment. In addition, there are school counsellors who are not graduates of psychology but rather depart from an educational career. In Indonesia, school counselling directly emerges from the world of education. The counsellor who oversees the task, after the guidance and counselling program became an official part of the 1975 education curriculum, generally came from graduates of the Guidance and Counselling study program, although some of them came from teachers of other fields who were assigned to carry out school counsellor assignments. Later, there were also many psychology or education psychology graduates who were generally assigned to schools (Cruess, Cruess, & Steinert, 2016; Watts, 1996; Webb, 2016).

Even though the situation is different, the problems such as misperception, confusion and role conflict as an impact of the obscurity on the professional identity of school counsellors are also found (Hiebert, Simpson, & ..., 1992; Weinreich & Saunderson, 2005; Woo, Henfield, & Choi,



2014). The obscurity of professional identity occurs among school counselling actors as well as from other educators and educational elements as well as from students' parents or the community, whereas the obscurity or weakness of professional identity can reduce service quality internally, while externally it can reduce appreciation to the guidance and counselling profession from other allied users and professionals, such as psychology and psychiatry. If the quality of service is ignored, the service will be abandoned. Thus, there is a kind of problem circle from the weakness of professional identity with service quality and the appreciation of service users and other allied professionals with educational counselling.

Identity, as the basis for the birth of professional identity, is a concept that is historically and culturally, at first, used to refer to collective identity, such as ethnicity, religion, and nation (Marcia, 1980). Further development, identity is seen as a social construct related to individual personality, social relations, subjective awareness and external context. Identity is the central value of a person who defines his relationship with others, conceptualises “I” with community and things that are spiritual and transcendent (Damon, dalam Atmoko, 2003).

It is famous that there is fifth stage of personality development according to Erik Erikson, namely: identity vs. role confusion. Usually in adolescence, individuals develop personal identities and a sense of self-confidence after so much experimenting with different roles, activities and actions, and not a little search for identity. Someone tries to get directions in life and how that fits in a society, even when they find that they are “fit” by acting against a society. If someone receives encouragement and reinforcement through exploration, maybe he develops with a strong identity (Erford, 2013).

With the development of specialisation in the lives of people and professions, it is further known as the term professional identity. This professional identity implies a psychological and sociological perspective with regard to the way people develop interactions with others (Alvarez & Lee, 2012; Livneh, 2002; Moodley & Dhingra, 2001; Wilkins, 1997). This is expressed in perceptions about ‘who they are’ and ‘who they want to be.’ Professional identity refers to a set of attitudes, beliefs, experiences, ideals and principles that determine someone in their professional career. Generally, these aspects tend to determine whom to interact with in their professional lives. This process of interaction and professional experience is to define one’s professional identity (Heaey & Hays, 2010).

Professional identity is the result of a developmental process that facilitates individuals to reach an understanding of their profession in relation to their own concepts, which enables them to articulate their roles, develop philosophy, and approach others within and outside their chosen field (Brott & Myers, 1999). Knowing who you are (who I am) is an important precursor to future tasks of intimacy, generation and integrity. Thus, a strong identity is very important for a meaningful and productive life and career (Erford, 2013).



Strong professional identity is required for school counsellors to develop the tools needed to promote and support themselves. This is the same process as trying to acquire knowledge consisting of skills and techniques. In addition, they have to learn who they are and what they do. After school counsellors understand this important concept, it will be easy for him to articulate himself to schools and other mental health professionals (Gray & McCollum, 2008).

The key question that requires answers through a research is how is the professional identity of middle school counsellors in East Java, Indonesia? The description obtained from this study is expected to be used as a basis for diagnosing and developing the professional identity of middle school counsellors.

Methods

Descriptive research using the survey method was carried out on guidance and counselling officers and school counsellors in the East Java region, Indonesia. A total of 358 subjects including guidance and counselling officers and school counsellors at SMPN and SMAN were screened at the investigation. School counsellors are those who are undergraduates in the field of guidance and counselling and have taken professional education, while guidance and counselling officers are officers with a background in undergraduate guidance and counselling but have not taken professional education and non-guidance and counselling scholars who have the task of conducting guidance and counselling in school. The sample was taken clustered in 3 East Java regions, namely west, middle and east. Each region is represented by two cities. This investigation deals with how participants see their status in the framework of the counsellor professional development model by Stoltenberg & Delworth, namely a personal development model that is seen as emerging and moving towards the goal of becoming a professional counsellor. To arrive at the professional level, a person will go through the initial development stage (level 1), trial and error stages (level 2), challenge and growth stages (level 3), and professional stages (level 4) (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987).

Two instruments are used for data collection. The first instrument is in the form of questions about academic qualifications and subject self-assessment within the framework of 4 levels of professional development of the counsellor. The goal is to find out how the subject perceives his status according to developmental levels, i.e. where is his position? The subject was asked to give an answer whether he was included in the first, second, third, or fourth level. The second instrument is the inventory of professionalism of 5-scale counsellors developed from the description of indicators of cognitive characteristics, affection, and counsellor behavior. This is in accordance with performance expectations at each level of counsellors development according to the framework of Stoltenberg and Delworth's theory. With these two instruments, the obtained data can be compared to the results.



RESULTS

Based on the first instrument, the results showed just a few subjects answered at level 1 and level 2; many subjects answered at level 3; and the majority of the subjects answered at level 4. Subjects who answered at level 4 are an average those who have graduated from the guidance and counselling education program. These results indicate that based on academic qualifications and self-perceptions, in general, the subject is judged to be at the professional level. The results of the analysis of the second instrument showed that none of the subjects had a score on level 4. Most of the scores showed achievements at level 2, and only a few of them were at levels 1 and 3. These results indicated the subject was generally at the trial level; only a small number of subjects are at the level of challenges and growth, and no one had reached the professional level.

The difference in the status of professional development of school counsellors revealed by these different instruments becomes an interesting issue, because it shows the existence of a discrepancy between self-perceptions based on academic administrative requirements and assessment results based on the inventory of the professionalism of school counsellors. It can be found a different level of representation if self-assessment is compared to the results of direct observations by experts (one method that is considered the most valid for determining the performance status of the counsellor).

The results of this study show that a counsellor's self-assessment is higher than the quality that has actually been achieved. The factors that lead to the higher self-assessment are apparently only based on academic qualifications. There is a tendency for guidance and counselling officers in schools to see themselves as being in the category of professional counsellors only based on formal requirements. They have seen themselves as being in the professional category as long as they have graduated from the guidance and counselling education program; without having to attend professional education and see real performance indicators. (Fauzan,2009). This phenomenon may require further research on whether self-perception has entered the professional category even though in terms of performance it is not yet achieved; it leads to stagnation or spurred professional development.

DISCUSSION

Thus, the issue of the professional identity development of the school counsellors in East Java is at a level that requires special attention, because school counsellors have not agreed with themselves. Self-assessment that is too high in terms of status without being compensated for the proper performance will have an impact on the disagreement of counsellors with themselves and a conflict of perceptions with mental health and other educational professionals, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and teachers; even other school personnel. Further impacts relate to the quality of provided services (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Obulutsa, 2016; Wadaani, 2015).



Misperceptions upon the role of school counsellors by administrators and school personnel, and other mental health professionals, are supported by the high self-assessment of school counsellors that can contribute to the blurring of functions and further hamper the process of strengthening the professional identity of school counsellors (Cheshire, 2013; England & Collings, 2000; Fear & Woolfe, 2000). Among the counsellors in charge of the school, there are still inaccuracies in roles both at the perception level and in practice. If misperceptions among school counsellors occur, how about the perception of other professionals and society in general?

Throughout the history of the counselling profession, school counsellors are often known as second-class counsellors by similar professions. Among the counsellors, sometimes there are feelings of inferiority compared to psychologists and psychiatrists. Such feelings often began to develop since they were still students of Guidance and Counselling education programs, and remained entrenched when they had graduated and worked. It is only from the author's personal experience while still a student, when there was a policy to name the School of Guidance and Counselling department become Department of Educational Psychology and Guidance (Christianson & Everall, 2008; Lidmila, 1997; Wheeler & King, 2001). There seemed little pride from the students and lecturers preferring to call themselves from the Department of Educational Psychology rather than emphasizing the word guidance. Some students even feel more confident when mentioning themselves from the Department of Psychology by disguising the words education and guidance. The phenomenon also shows that a number of bachelors of guidance and counselling graduates, once graduated from the Master's program of Psychology, seemed to forget their origins. Besides, according to Gray & McCollum (2008), as long as other school professionals treat school counsellors inappropriately and this belief is enshrined in the school environment (especially if the counsellor reinforces that perception and appreciation), the role of 21st century school counsellors as an integral component in academic and personal success of each student will never be reached.

This misperception also brought school counsellors involved with almost every aspect of the school's operations. As a result, these tasks greatly hampered the primary role of school counsellors in promoting academic needs, career planning, and personal / social development of each student. Such cases occur both in the USA as part of the 1999 ASCA annual report (Webber, 2006) and in Indonesia. Many school counsellors are better known as substitute teachers, 'fill ins', office workers, and conduct administrative work. Some counsellors who continue to carry out the tasks of guidance and counselling work unstructured, provide services without the theoretical background and skills foundation because the theories they have learned during college have been abandoned, immersed in work routines without a clear scheme.

The enactment of the school-based curriculum (KTSP of 2006) which includes a component of Self Development also causes a backwards step for the integration of strengthening the professional identity of the counsellor. The settings, service area, task context, and performance



expectations of the counsellor are brought to confusion, and confusion about teacher's performance expectations who share the services of experts in educational settings, so that the potential harms of the integrity of guidance and counselling services, are particularly important in formal education (Ditjen Dikti, 2007).

School counsellors, through the certification process in the last few years, have received educator certificates, but does that sufficiently strengthen their identity as school counsellors? It seems that the certification carried out in Indonesia is not enough to shape the soul of being counsellor. Some observers say that certification has not significantly changed their performance. Some suspect that financial goals are more prominent than professional work.

The lack of strong professional identity of school counsellors that has an impact on the lack of loyalty to the profession and ultimately leads to the question of how they take pre- service education. Tracking the document of the Counsellor's Professional Education Academic Paper as the ideal level of the curriculum and its description in the curriculum of the guidance and counselling education program as a formal level, seems to have not been adequately accommodated the importance of developing professional identity in an integrated manner. Efforts in that direction are actually exist. The arrangement of experience guiding the development of professional identity has been designed but seems late, because it was designed in the practical experience program in school;, even though it should have been started since the first semester of college students.

The Most important aspect is how to strengthen and improve the process of developing identity as a professional counsellor (Coppock, 2012). Uniqueness affirmation of professional identity is important for maintaining professional existence and appreciation of other humanitarian professional groups (mental health) and society in general. For this reason, the provision of time allocated for the development of professional identity can serve to strengthen and enhance the work of professional counsellors. The impact is of course on the counsellee or the served community. Counsellors will benefit if they are treated by professional counsellors who are not only competent in counselling skills, but they are also confident in the specific role of professional counsellors in providing services. They serve with the necessary competencies and self-confidence that promises hope of success.

Once counsellors are involved in the process of unique individual growth and development, it is expected that the counselling profession as a whole will strengthen as practitioners and educators who have a high sense of purpose and synergistic collective identity. For this reason, it firstly requires a clear foundation. As an effort to build this foundation, professional philosophy must be built in such a way that as it can explain and distinguish the school counsellor profession from other similar humanitarian calls (in this case, the mental health or other psychological services). In counselling, this foundation is made by formulating clear professional expectations through



licensing, efficient education programs, professional organizations, and ethical standards that build a philosophy which underlies the profession (Healey & Hays, 2010). School counsellors are expected to explain and distinguish the following: (a) the philosophy that underlies their professional group activities, and (b) services provided by school counsellors and other human assistance professionals (e.g. school social workers, and school psychologists). The most important thing is that the counsellor must show and communicate their pride in being a school counsellor (Gray & McCollum, 2008).

Such a step has been partially adopted by the compilation and publication of the Academic Manuscript for Professional Counselling and Guidance Services and Counselling in the Formal Education Pathway (Ditjen Dikti, 2007);, which was followed up with the development of the Guidance and Counselling education program curriculum in LPTK in Indonesia. However, the problem is not completed only with the production of basic references. The fact that the counselling profession is based on the same theory as psychology and psychiatry; the counsellor also uses the same instrument that the psychologist and psychiatrist use, it can be a source of ambiguity and a conflict of interest. It might be possible to explore cooperation to set limits on roles on the basis of equality and respect between professions. Furthermore, at the level of building science, guidance and counselling, it may need to develop more specific terms that show the uniqueness of guidance and counselling.

Assertion of roles needs to be continuously socialised and, coupled with other professionals at school. The teacher's role is didactic, based on teaching material, and evaluative; administrator evaluates, decides/judges, manages, and disciplines; while the counsellor's role is facilitative, non-judgmental, confidential, goal-oriented, and producing specific behavioral changes, it is expected to be the awareness of each stakeholder. In addition, to removing barriers to academic success, school counsellors also provide counselling and respond to crisis problems. However, most of the time is focused on counselling students and helping them improve their soft skills, planning for further study and work, and graduating from school satisfactorily. In that counselling is the most important component of the school counselling program, as the main pillar of the counsellor's professional identity.

Professional identity can be strengthened continuously by clarifying the role, according to Webber (2006), in several ways: first, developing a more detailed job description that reflects the unique knowledge of counselling, disposition, and skills. School counsellors are part of the education team but not in the teacher's job description., Second, defining professional roles and boundaries when collaborating with interdisciplinary teams with teachers, social workers and school psychologists., Third, develop a counselling program that reaches all students based on local needs assessment. Culturally, competent school counsellors are uniquely trained to advocate students' problems upon being undeserved and marginalized. Fourth, advocacy for the professional future is reinforced through the involvement of counsellors in professional counselling associations. A

strong and consistent professional identity based on affiliation with professional counselling associations is an important factor in efforts to strengthen this identity, resulting in clarification of the counsellor's role and its contribution.

Another view, complementing the solutions declared by Webber which were proposed by Gray and McCollum (2008), as an effort to strengthen the professional identity of this school counsellor, is that the issue of developing the professional identity of school counsellors that is intensively discussed in training and education programs. Specific issues related to the development of school counsellors' professional identities that must be examined include: (1) ongoing uncertainty about the role of school counsellors in the school environment, (2) lack of agreement among school counsellors about specific roles and functions, and (3) specialists of psychological assistance who does not want to see school counsellors as mental health professionals who are just as competent. The discussion of the issue towards professional identity needs to be raised in the intra-curricular activities since the early semester, and even developed in the co-curricular activities during student days (Fear & Woolfe, 2000; Magnuson & Norem, 2002; Thorne & Dryden, 1991; Webb, 2016).

Furthermore, so school counsellors get more adequate acceptance in the field of psychological services and develop strong professional identities, an integrated mission must exist in the profession. The requirements to become a school counsellor influences the development of professional identity. Variations in academic and professional education as well as training among employment placement agency (LPTK) will invite misperceptions among school counsellors, users, similar professions and the community. Learning from the steps made by the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) takes two steps, namely: establishing training standards that are consistent and equivalent to those needed by counselling professionals and other psychological assistance and advocating for consistent certification standards and guidelines for school counsellors in each region (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Lidmila, 1997; Tyler, 1972).

In the end, it was concluded that professional identity requires the loyalty and self-esteem of school counsellors as well as an increase in appreciation from similar professions, eliminate role haziness and conflict, also rectify the misperceptions that have arisen. To develop a strong professional identity, it is important as long as pre-service and post-service education is devised with an experience which is not only in skills and techniques, but also in sharpening awareness in the knowledge of who they are and what they should do.

CONCLUSION

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