

A GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING MODEL PRACTICED WITHIN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Guidance and counseling services were first introduced in Malaysian schools in the early 1960s. The initiative started with career and guidance services gradually widened in scope in line with the needs and problems which resulted from the development and changes within the fields of economy, science, and technology. The guidance and counseling services in Malaysian schools have made specific modifications based on the guidance and counseling model practiced in schools in the United States of America. These changes are deemed appropriate in order to fulfill the cultural characteristics of the local community. This paper discusses the historical development of guidance and counseling services in Malaysian schools, current counselling model, and implementation issues. In addition, anticipated future trends in this field is also presented.

Keywords: counseling in Malaysian schools, counseling model

INTRODUCTION

The practice of giving and receiving assistance, advice and guidance is a familiar tradition within the Malaysian society. As noted by Abdul Halim (2001) and Amla et. al (2009), advisory and social support among members of the Malay community has existed long before colonial administration. The compassion, warmth and closeness, along with the roles and responsibilities of village heads, head of mosques or respected elders played major roles in ameliorating social misunderstandings and problems arising from all walks of the community. However, the developments and advancements in the industrial, science and technology fields (Suradi, 2004) have rendered such traditional assistance and services insufficient to fulfill current requirements. Today's daily crisis and pressures within the society require a more systematic and sophisticated form of support system (Abdul Halim, 1999). As a result, guidance and counseling services were then introduced in schools to guide students especially in the form of career guidance (Pope et. al, 2002), and to overcome social problems arising from the rapid economic changes within the country (Johari,

2002). From time to time, the services rendered by guidance and counseling underwent improvements in order to cater for not only the academic or career development of students, but more importantly to ensure students' future psychosocial and mental well being.

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES IN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

The development of guidance and counseling in Malaysia is rather similar to that which occurred in the United States of America (Amla et. al, 2009; Pope et. al, 2002). The initial focus of the guidance and counseling services was on vocational guidance. This then transformed into fostering students personal growth, enhancing personal development and the implementation of a comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling program (Galassi & Akos, 2004). The early beginnings of the guidance and counseling services in Malaysian schools started when the country's economic focus shifted from agriculture to industry. At that time, vocational guidance in schools was deemed to be necessary to equip students with the ability to choose education fields according to individual talent and ability, and be capable of making future career plans (Suradi, 1994a). The introduction of a structured guidance services in Malaysian schools was initiated in 1963 when 11 education officials followed a six-month course conducted by Russel M. Mackenzie, a guidance consultant from Canada. Following this, efforts aimed to improve the services continued to develop further (Suradi, 1994b). It has now been five decades since the guidance and counseling services were made available in schools. The guidance and counseling services have gone through many changes and transformations in a bid to provide effective and optimum services to students. Students now seek counseling services to assist in finding solutions to the multitude of problems facing them in the modern globalised world.

The following historical development of the guidance and counseling services in Malaysian schools is based on the following references: government circulars and directives issued by the Ministry of Education (1975, 1976, 1979, 1996, 2008, and 2012), research and publications conducted by Amla et. Al (2009), Azman (2004), Glamcevski (2008), See & Ng (2010), Scorzellii (1987) and Suradi (2004; 1994a; 1994; 1992).

- 1963 - Eleven education officials from every State Education Department followed a six-month course conducted by a guidance consultant from Canada.
- 1964 - The course participants would act as trainers and return to their respective states and conduct courses for selected senior teachers of secondary schools. These senior teachers would then deliver the information received to teachers in their respective schools.

The guidance and counseling services became more organised. The Ministry of Education then directed school principals to appoint a guidance teacher to head the school Guidance and Counseling Services Unit (KP5209/35(4), 1964.
- 1966 - Buku Perkhidmatan dan Panduan di Sekolah (School Guidance Services Book) was published by the Ministry of Education and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to be referred to when providing guidance services.

- 1968 - The English version of the School Guidance Services Book was published.
With reference to circular KP5209/30(13) from the Ministry of Education, dated 1 September 1968, all schools must appoint a guidance teacher who would be given only 25 periods of academic workload per week.
- 1975 - With reference to circular KP8548/4/75 from the Ministry of Education, dated 5 September 1975, the guidance teacher was required to provide counseling services and advice to students who were caught smoking within the school compound. This was to hinder students from being involved in drug abuse.
- 1976 - With reference to circular KP(BS)8548/4/1/Vol.II (49) from the Ministry of Education, all schools were required to provide a special room to facilitate career and guidance services to students.
- 1979 - The roles of the guidance teacher covered 21 job functions of duties including academic advice, personal guidance and efforts to prevent drug abuse among students.
With reference to circular KP(BS)8548/4/Jld. IX/(1) from the Ministry of Education, dated 17 January 1979, principals were directed to ensure that counselors play active roles in schools.
- 1980 - The Career and Guidance Unit was renamed Guidance and Counseling Unit. The guidance teacher was also responsible for overcoming discipline problems in schools. Their duties now involved 22 job functions.
- 1982 - With reference to circular KP(PP)0050/117/Jld. 2 (1) from the Ministry of Education, the workload of a guidance teacher was decreased to 12 periods weekly. The support provided by the ministry was aimed to ensure that students will benefit from the guidance and counseling services provided.
- 1984 - The Ministry of Education launched the book "Panduan Pelaksanaan Khidmat Bimbingan dan Kaunseling di Sekolah" (Guidelines for the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools). The guidelines stated the concept, philosophy, ethics and ten categories of guidance services. It became a guide to school counselors in managing effective guidance and counseling programs in schools.
- 1985 - 888 guidance teachers were appointed as counselors. 17 of them had obtained masters degree in the counseling field.
- 1993 - A revised edition of the book Guidelines for the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools was published .
- 1996 - With reference to circular KP(BS-HEP)8543/60/(91) from the Ministry of Education, dated 18 March 1996, full-time counselors were appointed in secondary schools. The work scope, responsibilities, and roles of full-time counselors were clearly defined to ensure effectiveness. The counselor-to-student ratio was suggested at 1:750.
With reference to circular KP(BS)8591/Jld.VIII/35 from the Ministry of Education, dated 11 July 1996, full-time counselors were directed to adhere to office hours from 8.00 a.m. till 4.00 p.m. Their responsibilities included 22 job functions covering five major areas.

2 303 full-time school counselors were appointed.

- 2003 - The Ministry of Education proposed that the counselor-to-student ratio be 1:500.
- 2004 - A total of 1 400 secondary schools throughout Malaysia have full-time counselors. In the primary schools, the number of full-time counselors was 3 400.
- 2008 - Following the circular released in 1996, all schools were directed to ensure effective guidance and counseling services were provided. With reference to circular KP(BPSH-SPPK) 601/3 Jld. 3 (23) from the Ministry of Education, dated 17 December 2008, counselors were expected to provide services according to the school sessions. One of the compulsory programs to be carried out was personality and emotional development for the students.
- 2012 - With reference to circular KP(BPSH-SPPK) 201/005/02 Jld. 4(5) from the Ministry of Education, dated 16 April 2012, the services provided was reengineered to focus on students' personality development and discipline. These efforts are aimed at developing students who are knowledgeable, skilled, humane in nature and with a sense of moral values.

Based on the historical overview of the guidance and counseling services in Malaysia, it can be seen that the first ten years were focused on the training of teachers for the roles of school counselors. In the following 15 years, their roles were widened to encompass overcoming social problems that could lead to societal disharmony such as drug abuse and indiscipline among students. Efforts are now being geared to the development of students' mental balance and soundness through continuous guidance and counseling services. The Malaysian government's continued support and recognition of guidance and counseling services in schools establishes its importance towards the development of individuals who are socially and spiritually balanced and thus contribute to the overall well-being of the society. In addition, guidance and counseling services ought to be made available at the primary school level to ensure success in transforming young minds.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING MODEL IN SCHOOLS

Based on the literature review conducted by Galassi & Akos (2004) and Oscodal (2005), it was concluded that most of the schools in the United States utilized a comprehensive guidance and counseling services in the implementation of guidance and assistance. One of the important comprehensive programs used by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program, also known as the Missouri Model. Gysbers and his associates designed this model in the 1980s, which later underwent various transformations from time to time (Oscodal, 2005). In the early 1970s, the comprehensive program introduced in schools was aimed to re-orientate existing guidance and counseling services and to assist students in their life-career development. The counselor's role was to develop students' knowledge and skills

through structured experiences designed to support them in developing the skills necessary to function as responsible and productive citizens. The emphasis on activities such as counseling sessions, information assessment, placement and follow-up, guidance and counseling services were less focused towards administrative and clerical job functions.

The Missouri Model consists of three elements which are; (1) content, which involves students' academic, career, and personal/social development; (2) organizational framework, which comprises three structural components (program definition, rationale, and assumptions on which it is based) and (3) resources, which includes human resources, financial, and political resources (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Based on the details pertaining to the three elements, it can be concluded that the model requires collaboration and co-operation from all components including parents and administrators. Well planned strategies are needed to ensure that the objective of developing students who are competent and skilled academically, career-wise and socially. The roles and responsibilities of a school counselor is becoming more and more challenging. School counselors are not only involved with guidance and counseling services in classrooms. They are also required to organize school programs, provide individual and group counseling and consultation services, and undertake research. In addition, counselors need to constantly update their knowledge and skills to cope with the needs and expectations of their profession. Gysbers (2004) stated that under the comprehensive developmental guidance program, counselors need to constantly review how the activities designed have transformed the lives of the students. In other words, counselor accountability serves as the fundamental principle of effective services.

The national model developed by ASCA (Oscodal, 2005) placed importance on three areas of student development; academic development, career development and personal/social development (Galassi & Akos, 2004). The comprehensive programs which are proactive and preventive in nature, provides a guideline to the counseling services in schools to ensure improvement of students' performance (ASCA, 2012; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008; Utah State Office of Education, 2008). There are four components based on this model which forms the program framework, (1) the foundation; (2) management; (3) accountability; and (4) delivery. The main focus is the delivery system, which accounts for at least 80% of overall program activities. As such, ASCA proposed that the counselor-to-student ratio at 1:250 to ensure optimum efforts can be delivered by counselors. The school counseling program's delivery system focuses on two aspects: (1) direct services which include school guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and (2) indirect services which include counseling activities, consultation and referral. In addition, the guideline also listed activities which are suitable or unsuitable to be included in such programs. Effective school counselors are those who can provide counseling services that enable students to develop their potential, identify and provide solutions to problems and assist students in implementing individual learning plan directed toward identifying and achieving future academic and career goals. Similar to the Missouri Model, ASCA National Model also emphasizes collaborative efforts between counselors, parents and teachers to provide a conducive environment that promotes students success.

The guidance and counseling services model practiced in Malaysian schools also emphasizes students' academic, career, and personal/social development. With reference to

circular KP(BS)8548/4/Jld. IX/(1) from the Ministry of Education, dated 17 January 1979, the duties of the guidance teacher included: (1) academic guidance (choosing of subjects); (2) career guidance (career interest inventory, career information and choices); (3) personality development; and (4) drug prevention and rehabilitation. Other than these major responsibilities, responsibilities also involve 21 job functions which encompass activities such as administration of psychological assessments, organize seminars/ talks/ exhibitions/ educational trips, conduct research/counseling sessions/consultation and record keeping. The book "Panduan Pelaksanaan Khidmat Bimbingan dan Kaunseling di Sekolah" (Guidelines for the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools) published in 1984 clearly defined the implementation model to be practiced in schools.

According to Sidek et. al (2005), the content covers the concept, philosophy, and ethical principles used to structure the guidance and counseling services in schools. Apart from that, school counselors are also required to offer ten categories of services which included: (1) student inventory; (2) dissemination of information; (3) counseling; (4) group counseling; (5) placement; (6) drug prevention education; (7) consultation and referral services; (8) consultation sessions with parents; (9) coordination of resources; and (10) carrying out various forms of assessments. In 1993, a revised edition of the book was published. Similar to the emphasis evident in the Missouri Model and ASCA National Model, the guidance and counseling services model implemented in Malaysian schools also places emphasis on the development of student career paths through a program which is comprehensive in scope, proactive and preventive in design. Suradi (2004) highlights four general objectives of guidance and counseling services in schools, which includes; (1) enrichment services; (2) preventive programs; (3) rehabilitation services; and (4) crisis counseling. The book "Panduan Pelaksanaan Khidmat Bimbingan dan Kaunseling di Sekolah" (Guidelines for the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools) is the main reference (Suradi, 2004).

In 1996, there was a review on the job specifications and responsibilities of school counselors. With reference to circular KP(BS-HEP)8543/60/(91) from the Ministry of Education, dated 18 March 1996, three main areas were defined. These included: (1) academic guidance (choosing of subjects, study skills, placement); (2) career guidance (career interest inventory, career information and choices); (3) psychosocial and mental health (personality development, psychosocial skills, social skills, self defense skills). The school counselor has 22 responsibilities covering activities such as program planning and implementation, counseling sessions, consultation and personnel networking. In 1998, counselors were required to handle individual and group counseling sessions, teaching duties, and conduct personality development programs for students. Six teaching topics were introduced which included: (1) study skills; (2) career guidance; (3) psychosocial education and mental health; (4) leadership skills; (5) smoking and drug prevention education; and (6) HIV and AIDS prevention education. The six topics were compulsory in all primary and secondary schools. However, the content varied according to age groups. The program implementation included five compulsory programs that covered: (1) focus group counseling; (2) peer counseling; (3) leadership for school prefects; (4) student orientation; and (5) guidance and counseling club. Counselors were also required to groom emotionally stable students to ensure the development of human capital is realized in line with *Pelan Induk*

Pembangunan Pendidikan (The National Education Blue Print). More time is allocated to counseling activities when schools are in session.

Today, the focus of guidance and counseling services in schools has changed from the three areas (academic, career, and psychosocial) to the following: (1) personality development; (2) discipline; (3) career education; and (4) psychosocial and mental health. Counselors need to design activities and intervention services that can instill moral values and good discipline among students. Also, counselors need to coordinate activities that can promote socialization, emotional management and positive thinking among students. Among the activities that can be organized are administration of student profile, preventive education, consultation with parents, individual and group counseling and dissemination of information. With reference to circular KP(BPSH-SPPK) 201/005/02 Jld. 4(5) from the Ministry of Education, dated 16 April 2012, 90% of a counselor's responsibility is to be given to guidance and counseling services and the remaining 10% can be for outside school activities. Schools counselors need to collaborate with many stakeholders to ensure a quality and effective counseling program. School administrators provide vital support for the implementation of the counseling program by allowing the time, facilities and resources to facilitate the process.

ISSUES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES

Although it has been almost 50 years since the introduction of guidance and counseling services in Malaysian schools, the duration is still inadequate to ensure excellence in its implementation. The popular demands for counseling services reflect its increasing importance (Abdul Halim, 1999; Suradi, 2004; See & Ng, 2010). There are still many constraints that need to be overcome before an effective and comprehensive program can be successfully implemented. Research by Suradi (1992) confirms that school counselors faced a variety of constraints which hinder successful implementation of guidance and counseling program at the school level. These constraints include: (1) time constraint due to too many job functions; (2) lack of counseling skills; (3) lack of cooperation from administrators, teachers and parents; (4) poor response from students; (5) lack of facilities; and (6) misperceptions from teachers and administrators. Suradi (1994b) also concluded that factors such as lack of skills, misunderstandings regarding the implementation of counseling services, and confusion with regards to counselor responsibilities were contributing to program ineffectiveness. See (2004) and Johari (2009) also identified similar problems with lack of skills, heavy workload and confusion with regards to counselor responsibilities. Findings by Sidek et. al (2005) found that even though school guidance and counseling services are recognized, many counselors were overburdened with administrative and teaching responsibilities. They were unable to fulfill their duties as full-time counselors.

Findings such as those of Bakar et. al (2001) concluded that Malaysian counselors were very positive regarding their work. It is important to maintain positive values towards their responsibilities because professional counseling requires highly committed individuals. Bakar et. al (2001) propose that to maintain positive commitment, counselors must be willing to improve their content knowledge and counseling skills through life-long learning. Malaysian counseling experts

such as Abdul Halim (1999), See (2004), and Suradi (2004) also place importance on the continuous training of counselors. Other than the need for continuous training, there is a need to consider the influence of Malaysian culture and traditions on counseling practices and efforts. As detailed by Mansor (2010) and Suradi (2004), Malaysian students are unwilling to seek counseling services voluntarily. Even troubled students would remain silent rather than seek counsel. They will wait for clear instructions from authority figures such as teachers for mandated counseling. The success of counseling services is dependent on the culture of the society and so understanding the Malaysian culture is necessary in addressing appropriate counseling approaches. Cultural values such as respect for the elders or authority figures, collectivist value orientation, and preference to directives influence voluntary involvement of clients. Those who need personal guidance (Mansor, 2010) or have issues with misconduct (Jin et. al, 2012; Johari, 2009) will only seek counseling services when directed. Differences between cultures have a great influence in the practice of counseling in Malaysian schools. The differences between the Western and Eastern cultures have also caused different approaches to counseling practices in Malaysian schools especially in mandated counseling as defined by the Western approach (Mansor, 2010) . It is clear that a theoretical approach based on the Malaysian culture and traditions is needed so that effective counseling practices can be provided to suit the needs of the Malaysian students (Suradi, 2004).

THE FUTURE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SERVICES IN MALAYSIA

There is awareness and recognition of the importance of the role played by school counselors. This is evident because many local universities including Sultan Idris Education University are offering graduate and post-graduate counseling degrees and the number of students is increasing year by year. The Malaysian government's recognition and support of qualified counseling services in Malaysian schools have helped to enhance the growth and development of counseling in Malaysia. This is evident through the establishment of the National Counseling Council, the Counselors Act and the Malaysian Counseling Association. Counselors need to be ethical and professional because their services will continue to have a significant impact on the personal, career, and academic success and development of students.

CONCLUSION

In Malaysia, guidance and counseling services are recognized as an integral part of the total educational program and as effective means to maximize student success and student behavior. The continuous improvement and revision of school guidance and counseling services are needed in ensuring quality professional services are maintained. School counseling services in Malaysian schools have gone through many stages and milestones, but there are still many challenges to be faced. School counselors must be accepted as essential partners in the challenge to improve educational opportunities of students in their future careers. Continued support and collaboration from all parties especially the Malaysian government is crucial to enhance the status and implementation of guidance and counseling services in Malaysian schools.

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