

Promoting Counseling Competence using Self-Reflection

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Abstract. Self-Reflection (SR) has received a high degree of attention in extant Counseling Competence (CC). The present study sought to determine the relation of SR subscale; self awareness, and managing strategies with the three general areas in CC; performing helping skill, managing the counseling process, and handling challenging counseling situations. A total of 100 counselor trainees completed The Self-awareness and Management Strategies (SAMS) Scale to measure the SR, and the Counselor Activity Self-Efficacy Scales (CASES) to measure the CC. Result of the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient indicated there is a significant relationship between SR; Self-awareness with CC; handling challenging counselling, and SR; management strategies with all the three general areas in CC. A discussion of the findings are presented and several implications and recommendations for further development of CC are proposed.

1 Introduction

Self-reflection in counselling practices is an action that is based on theories, beliefs and assumptions. All three of these components are drivers toward the understanding of a counsellor to his clients, in guiding them when choosing the most appropriate intervention for their clients [4].

The process of self-reflection is also seen as a continuation of the development of supervisory practices. Morrisette et. al [11] emphasized that reflectivity is fundamental in the process of self-supervision. In fact, she also stated that self-monitoring, self-assessment, self-evaluation, self-reporting and self-management are among the elements of reflection. Morrisette also postulated that reflection can improve self-consciousness or self-awareness, and the ability to apply a clinical approach in work from various perspectives, as well as reducing countertransference issues.

Self-reflection is done by questioning the assumptions made and the expectations held, beliefs, and values that led to the elements of open-mindedness, thoughtfulness, and intellectual responsibility. Regardless of how counsellors choose to do self-reflection, the

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principles set out above are necessary to support the self-assessment process. Finally, reflection can be done naturally and spontaneously. However, for some counsellors, the presence of a supervisor who acts as mentors can assist them in improving the practice of reflection.

In general, self-reflection is a complex undertaking that includes (a) introspection, (b) self-awareness, and (c) self-assessment. Ultimately, understanding, skills, and the counsellor's function can be enhanced [11].

2 Research Objective

The focus of this study is to:

1. identify the stages of SR among counsellor trainee.
2. identify the relationship between SR and CC; performing helping skill, managing the counseling process, and handling challenging counseling situations Figures and tables, as originals of good quality and well contrasted, are to be in their final form, ready for reproduction, pasted in the appropriate place in the text. Try to ensure that the size of the text in your figures is approximately the same size as the main text (10 point). Try to ensure that lines are no thinner than 0.25 point.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Self-Reflection

The process of reflection is also seen as a continuation in the development of supervisory practices [12]. Morrisette et. al [11] emphasized that reflectivity is the cornerstone in the self supervision process. He also mentioned that self-monitoring, self-assessment, self-evaluation, self-reporting and self-management are the elements of reflection. In addition, Morrisette stated that reflection can enhance self-awareness and the ability to apply the clinical approach in one's work from various perspectives, as well as reducing countertransferences.

The practice of reflection can be a very useful process in the practice of counseling. Reflection can help the counselor trainee remember their counseling practices. The situation allows for the trainees to better understand themselves, are less likely to accentuate personal issues to their clients, and are more likely to treat the issues faced by their clients.

Reflection in applied disciplines is adopted based on the contribution from the results of previous studies, including Dewey (1933), Shcön (1987) and Kolb [7] These three researchers stressed on the reflective thinking aspect as a means to resolve issues arising in the workplace. For example, diagnosis and clinical strategies are crucial in nursing courses whereby both actually derive from reflective thinking [5]. Reflective thinking involves internal assessment and exploration which will provide awareness to individuals who combines changes that eventually trigger the acceptance of a concept from a new perspective (Boyd & Fales, 1983).

3.2 Counselling Competence

Urbani et al. [15] focused their study on 18 counselling skills which are divided into three stages of counselling process, namely; exploring, understanding, and acting. Each level consists of six counselling skills. Six skills in the exploring stage are, eye contact, body language, tone of voice, questioning, paraphrasing, and summarizing. The understanding

stage consists of skills to identify content and feelings, self-disclosure, concrete and specific expressions, urgency (of the situation, actions, and feelings), and confrontation. Meanwhile, the acting stage consists of decision-making skills, making selections, creating expectations, gaining approval, making an appointment and reviewing all goals and actions to determine the outcome. These elements encourage the efficacy of counselling and growth of cognitive complexity [15].

In fact, counselling skills include all elements of the skills that can help mobilize and facilitate clients when meeting counsellors, ensuring a comfortable atmosphere. The basic counselling components of warmth, sincerity, empathy, unconditional acceptance and congruence are the basic skills that are important and must be mastered by a counsellor trainer [13]. Therefore, supervisors should emphasize and focus on the supervisory process.

Basic counselling skills such as open and closed questions, paraphrasing, reflection of contents, reflecting feelings, asking for clarification, confrontation, identification and information are the second most important component that should be attained by a counsellor [13]. These components also incorporate all other counselling approach which differentiates counselling session interactions with normal conversations. Therefore, acquiring control and skills over the two components is essential towards being a good counsellor.

Skills development in therapeutic efficiency is affected not only by educational experience, but also by the students' view on their counselling ability to perform counselling sessions effectively (Larson and Daniels, 1998; Bandura, 1991; Kirsch, 1986). A strong belief in the ability to perform a wide range of required skills, allow trainees to blend their skills in a counselling environment [14,15] with monitoring by supervisors

3.3 Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory explains how people learn and acquire knowledge [7]. This theory views knowledge as a result of the transformational process of experience. The combination of understanding and transforming experiences will provide new inputs and is influenced by various factors such as the type of personality, educational background and career endeavor. Kolb Learning Experience theory is an experience-based learning approach that has gained the attention of various fields of study, especially those in need of practical training.

Experiential learning consists of two dimensions, namely; (I) the understanding and acceptance of experience, and (ii) the transformation of experience. The dimension of understanding and acceptance is formed by two processes, namely through "Concrete Experience" and "Conceptual Abstract". Meanwhile, the dimensions of transformation are "Reflective Observation" and "Active Experimentation".

This theory can be explained in the form of a process cycle. This cyclical process starts from concrete experience (what is happening?), followed by observation of reflection (think back, what happened?). Then, this process will be followed by a conceptual abstract, which is a reflection on what sparked the idea. Active experimentation process refers to the actions taken. This reaction stems from the idea that is driven by conceptual abstract [7].

According to Anderson et al. [1] the underpinning of Kolb's Learning Experience theory consist of three basic principles, namely;

- i. Learning involves the whole individual person; sensory, cognitive and emotion.
- ii. The learning of new experience is affiliated with the individual's past experience.

- iii. Regular practice of self-reflection allows the experience to be understood in depth.

Kolb et. al [7] stated that the quality of reflection will bring people to learn the important learning outcomes, rather than the experience itself. This indicates that experience without reflection will not bring favourable results. Internship training provides an opportunity for counsellors to learn through practical experience in a real working environment. Learning can only happen through experience, based on its continuity and interactions.

4 Methodology

This study is a correlational study. The focus of this study is to identify the relationship of self-reflection with counseling competence among counselor trainees.

4.1 Measurement

The study used a set of questionnaire consisting of three sections: background of respondent, self-reflection, and competence of counsellor trainee. Two questionnaires were used to obtain the required information.

The instrument SAMS Scale was used to measure self-reflection. The SAMS scale designed by Williams, Hurley, O'Brien, and DeGregoria et. al [16]. The SAMS scale consists of 25-items divided into two dimensions: self-awareness and management strategies. Items within each dimension are rated on a likert scale of 1-5.

Meanwhile, the instrument CASES was used to measure competence of counsellor trainee. The CASES designed by Lent, Hill, and Hoffman [9]. It consists of 41-items divided into three dimensions: performing helping skills, managing the counselling process, and handling challenging counselling situations. Items within each dimension are rated on a likert scale of 0-9.

4.2 Sampling and Recruitment

The sample consists of 100 counselor trainee from four universities who are undergoing internship training. Stratified random sampling was selected to ensure a balance of sample was taken from the population.

First of all elements in the population isolated in groups according to the university. The samples will then be selected at random in each group were segregated. The study population consisted of counselor trainees from four Universities in Malaysia. Samples were selected based on the percentage of revenue derived from the ratio of counselors to the number of trainees in universities. The advantage of using stratified sampling method is more accurate findings obtained in which, through isolation strata of the population to provide an opportunity for each element to be selected.

4.3 Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis involving frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. At the same time, inferential analyses were tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient.

5 Result and Discussion

The following are the findings of this study:

Table1: Distribution of the Respondents according to Demography.

Demography	Frequencies	Percentages
Gender		
Male	22	22%
Female	78	78%
Race		
Melay	88	88%
Chinese	9	9%
Indian	3	3%
Internship Setting		
School	44	44%
University	44	44%
Government organization	8	8%
Non-Government organization	4	4%

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to demography. Distribution of sample based on gender shows that male respondents are 22 person (22%) and female are 78 person (78%). The distribution of the respondents according to race shows that Malay respondents are 88 person (88%), Chinese are 9 person (9%), and Indian are 3 person (3%), meanwhile the distribution of the respondents according to internship setting shows that respondents who are doing in school are 44 person (44%), university are 44 person (44%), government organization are 8 person (8%), and non-government organization Indian are 4 person (4%).

Stages of Self-Reflection and Counselling Competence

The mean for self-reflection is 81.45 (SD = 7.99). Frequency distribution according to level of self-reflection shows that the majority of respondents were at a moderate level, totalling 92 respondents (92%). Only eight respondents (8%) reached a high level of self-reflection and one reached a low level. Table 2 details out the result of the study.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of self-reflection level

Self-Reflection	Frequency	Percentage
High (93 to 125)	8	8%
Moderate (59 to 92)	92	92%
Low (25 to 58)	1	1%

Mean=81.45

Std. deviation = 7.99

Meanwhile, the mean for ability to apply counselling skills is 263.23 (SD = 40.93). Frequency distribution according to their capacity to apply counselling skills showed that the majority of respondents are at a high level, totalling 65 respondents (65%), while 35 respondents (35%) were at a moderate level. No one scored the lowest level.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of the ability to apply counselling skills

Counseling Competence		Frequency	Percentage
High	(247 to 369)	65	65%
Moderate	(124 to 246)	35	35%
Low	(0 to 123)	0	0%
Mean = 263.23		std. deviation = 40.93	

Correlation between Of Self-Reflection and Counselling Competence

As indicates in table 4 there is a small positive correlation between self reflection with performing helping skills ($r_{(99)} = .255, p=.010$) and handling challenging counselling situations ($r_{(99)} = .270, p=.007$). Meanwhile no significant correlation between selfreflection with managing the counselling process ($r_{(99)} = .158, p=.116$).

Table 4. Correlations Coefficients between self- and Counselling Competence

Variables	Self reflection			Std. Deviation
	r	Sig.	M	
Performing helping Skills	.255	.010	100.39	15.535
Managing the counselling process	.158	.116	70.95	10.897
Handling challenging counselling situations	.270	.007	91.89	20.393

Mean=81.45 Std. Deviation=7.998

The study had comprehensively discussed and analyzed the self-reflection variable based on the framework of Experience Learning Theory. Self-reflection factor is measured based on the perspectives of counsellor trainees in the context of supervisory internship counselling.

Based on Kolb Learning Experience theory, this reflection process starts from concrete experience (what is happening?), followed by observation of reflection (think back, what happened?). Then, this process will be followed by a conceptual abstract, which is reflection on what sparked the idea. On the other hand, active experimentation process refers to the actions taken. This reaction stems from the idea that is driven by conceptual abstract [7].

Magnuson and Norem [10] found that self-reflection is able to help counsellors' development, and can even enhance the ability of counsellors to improve their efficiency as a counsellor. Counsellors who constantly practice self-reflection on their experience are

able to think critically about their clients as well as their interaction sessions. Continuous reflection process allows the efficiency of these counsellors to grow.

The current study's findings support previous studies like Larson and Daniels (1998), whereby they reported self-reflection can improve the self-efficacy of counselling. Bolin [3] also found that the process of self-reflection promotes change and improve the practice of an occupation. The practice of self-reflection should be managed on an ongoing basis which involves the process of planning, taking action, deliberating and making reflections.

The Kolb Learning Experience theory also emphasizes on a regular practice of the reflection process. The practice of self-reflection allows the experience to be understood more in depth. Self-reflection also involves a learning process by involving the entire sensory, cognitive and emotion [1].

6 Conclusion

Research findings can provide a general overview counselling competence among trainee counselor in Malaysia. Accurate counselling competence may be challenging to obtain. Yet, such precision in measuring competence may be necessary for a supervisor to maintain and enhance his or her supervisee skills as well as gaining insight into the more global awareness boundaries of competence. The hope of this current research is to build on prior findings and add a small but important increase in our understanding, by seeing if counselors-in-training can obtain accurate self-assessments of their skills and examining why this might be.

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