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Improving Counseling Communication Competencies of Guidance and Counseling Teachers in Creating Safe and Child-Friendly Schools

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Abstract

Improving the quality of Guidance and Counseling (BK) services is a strategic pillar in realizing safe and child-friendly schools (SRA). However, the communication style of school counselors in the field is often directive and reactive, reinforcing the stigma of counselors as "school police." This Community Service (PKM) program aims to improve and refresh (recall and refresh) junior high school counselors' counseling communication competencies (micro-counseling) in Bekasi City, Indonesia. Using a participatory action research (PAR) design and an experiential learning approach, the program organized structured training, small-group mentoring, role-play practices guided by a practical pocketbook, case studies through bullying video media, and student case consultations. A quantitative evaluation was conducted on 12 school counselors who completed the full pre-test and post-test series. The evaluation showed an increase in the average competency score from 62.50 to 68.75, with 58.3% of participants increasing their individual scores. Although the Wilcoxon test showed the increase was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level ($Z = -1.622$, $p = 0.105$) because the activity primarily refreshed existing skills, the program succeeded in transforming counselors' paradigms qualitatively and practically. The participants were able to apply the 9 flows of empathic counseling skills and handle real cases of students threatened with expulsion through an approach based on children's rights and best interests. The results imply that short-term micro-counseling training requires continuous clinical supervision to deeply internalize empathic communication, which ultimately fosters a psychologically safe space and increases students' self-referral to counseling services.

Keywords: Counseling Communication Competence, Child-Friendly School, School Counselor, Micro-Counseling, School Climate.

INTRODUCTION

Establishing a safe, inclusive, and child-friendly educational environment is increasingly crucial because it serves as a foundation for students' emotional stability and academic success (Djoehaeni et al., 2019; Simbolon & Purba, 2022). Establishing a safe and child-friendly school is crucial for fostering an educational environment free from violence and psychological distress, where students feel safe to explore their potential. This is becoming increasingly crucial as it serves as a primary foundation for students' emotional stability and academic success (Djoehaeni et al., 2019; Simbolon & Purba, 2022). Commitment to a safe, nurturing environment is fundamental to supporting each student's physical, mental, and individual development (Xiao et al., 2023). Guidance and Counseling teachers' counseling communication competency is a crucial mechanism for the objectives of the Community Service Program, as empathetic verbal and nonverbal engagement empowers educators to meet students' psycho-emotional needs and maintain a supportive,

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respectful atmosphere (Wang, 2023). By using strategies that prioritize openness and individual emotional needs, Guidance and Counseling teachers can significantly reduce students' stress and strengthen interpersonal relationships (Ardiani et al., 2025). Pedagogical interactions play an important role in reducing negative behaviors such as bullying (*bullying*), thus transforming the classroom into a protective space for student growth (Concepcion, 2025; Harefa et al., 2024).

At the practical level, Bekasi City Province, as an urban area with a high population density, faces very complex social dynamics in the junior high school (SMP) education sector. Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers play a strategic role as the frontline providers of psychological support and violence-prevention services in schools. However, the situational analysis and initial mapping from the Bekasi City Junior High School Guidance and Counseling Teachers' Conference (MGBK) indicate a fundamental gap in BK/Counselor teachers' communication competencies. BK teacher communication patterns in the field still tend to be directive, normative, one-way, and oriented towards disciplinary or regulatory enforcement (Erdiantoro & Nurmalasari, 2025). Micro-counseling skills such as active listening, empathy, reflection of feelings, and validation of emotions have not been optimally internalized (Yustiana et al., 2017).

Based on theoretical perspectives, the limitations of interactional communication strategies limit the development of trust-based relationships (trust-based relationships) and inhibit the creation of a sense of psychological security (psychological safety) for students (Itzchakov et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2025). When counselors/guidance teachers fail to adapt their communication strategies to the developmental needs and socio-emotional profiles of students, anxiety and a perception of being misunderstood arise. This reluctance can make students hesitant to disclose emotional difficulties (self-disclosure) to guidance personnel (Trang et al., 2024; Violin & Basuki, 2024).

From a process perspective, the guidance counselor-to-student ratio is inversely proportional, resulting in counseling services often being provided reactively and incidentally. Consequently, downstream, students are reluctant to utilize guidance counseling services because they don't perceive the school or counseling room as a safe haven or secure base (Sherman, 2017). Given this context, the research and community service activities aim to test the effectiveness of counseling communication competencies among guidance and counseling teachers in operationalizing the Safe and Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) initiative. Specifically, the Community Service seeks to answer questions regarding the characteristics of current communication competencies and the extent to which these skills facilitate the implementation of protective measures that correlate with indicators of school well-being, emotional health, and community support (Baldovino et al., 2022).

By answering these questions, the findings are expected to offer critical insights into the role of interpersonal dynamics in safeguarding children's rights within institutional frameworks and catalyzing an inclusive learning environment. To realize this, the community service team of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) held a structured intervention program with the objectives (Sherman, 2017; Erna, 2026; Malin, 2026) (1) to improve and refresh understanding (recall and refresh) practical counseling communication skills (micro-skills) BK teachers; (2) accompany BK teachers in implementing child protection-based counseling through simulations role-play, practical pocket books, and educational video media; and (3) strengthening the BK support system in handling real student cases based on the principles of Safe and Child-Friendly Schools (SRA).

Partner Problems and Solutions

Based on the results of the joint needs analysis with MGBK SMP Bekasi City partners, two main problem aspects were formulated along with the intervention solutions offered:

Professional Competence of Guidance and Counseling Teachers in Counseling Communication

Problem: Low mastery of empathetic micro-counseling skills and the continued dominance of one-way, directive-normative communication in handling student cases. Counselors struggle to navigate the intersection of cultural sensitivity, bias awareness, and practical interactions.

Solution: Implement structured training and small-group mentoring in child-friendly counseling communication. The material covers mastery of structured counseling skills, starting from attending, minimal encouragement, paraphrasing, reflection of feeling, questioning, clarification, unconditional positive regard (UPR) & empathy, focusing, to summarizing.

Guidance and Counseling Services and a Child-Friendly School Climate

Problem: Guidance and Counseling services are reactive/incidental, and students perceive Guidance and Counseling as the "school police." Students do not yet perceive Guidance and Counseling as a safe space (safe space), so the number of voluntary counseling referrals (self-referral) is very low.

Solution: Supervision/mentoring of structured counseling practices through role-play (acting as counselor, counselee, and observer), use of practical pocketbooks on counseling communication, use of video media simulating bullying cases, sharing session SRA, as well as consultation on critical student cases.

METHODS

Design

Community Service Activities (PKM) using Participatory Action Research (PAR). The PAR method was chosen because it prioritizes active, participatory collaboration between academic teams and practitioners (guidance and counseling teachers) to identify field problems, design interventions, and evaluate actions to transform guidance service practices in schools. The activity was carried out in the MGBK SMP Kota Bekasi area at the Bekasi City Education Office. A total of 12 guidance and counseling teachers participated in the small-group dynamics and completed the full series of quantitative measurements (pre-test and post-test). The limited selection of participants is intended to ensure the depth of intervention and intensity of skills mentoring during the training process.

The community service program is implemented through a series of stages based on a community service approach to experiential learning and structured participation. Operationally, the process begins with outreach activities and an initial assessment, coordinated with MGBK management and the Bekasi City Education Office. In the opening stage, training participants are directed to complete an initial competency test (pre-test) with as many as 15 validated questions and fill in an independent worksheet to recall (recall) basic concepts of counseling communication. Next, the activity moved into the training session and small-group division. Implementation workshop*:* The interactive session continued by dividing participants into small groups. Each group was facilitated by a guidance and counseling lecturer. Group 1 consisted of six guidance and counseling teachers (4 females, 2 males), and Group 2 consisted of six guidance and counseling teachers (5 females and 1 male).

Once group dynamics are established, the process continues with the application of science and technology through pocketbooks and video media. Participants receive a practical pocketbook on counseling communication as a guide for the simulation flow to stimulate analysis of bullying cases; the facilitator uses trigger media in the form of a short, interactive video collection, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Trigger media in the form of a video collection (short, interactive)

No	Trigger Video Media Category	Description
1	Bullying Physique	An interactive video featuring scenes of physical bullying in a school environment.
2	Verbal and Physical Bullying	A video simulation of a bullying case that combines verbal and physical incidents.
3	Cyber Bullying	Educational video about digital-based violence among students.
4	Psychological Impact on Victims	A video that focuses on the psychological and emotional conditions of victims of bullying.

Armed with an understanding of the media, training participants then carry out simulation practices (role-play) and reflection. Training participants take turns practicing communication-flow simulations using a role-sharing pattern: 1 person acts as a BK Teacher/Counselor, 1 person acts as a Counselee, and the other members act as Observers.

Table 2. Stages of Communication Practiced in a Structured Manner

No	Micro-Counseling Skills	Practice Description
1	Attending	Maintain eye contact, maintain an open body position, and maintain responsive facial expressions.
2	Minimal Encouragement	Provide minimal encouragement (e.g., "hmm", "then") to keep the client talking.
3	Paraphrasing	Restate the essence of the client's statement using concise counselor language.
4	Reflection of Feeling	Reflect the emotions and feelings the client experiences.
5	Questioning Skills	Ask relevant open/closed questions in an exploratory manner without being judgmental.
6	Clarification	Confirming information to align perceptions to avoid misunderstandings.
7	Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) & Reflection of Meaning	Accepting the client unconditionally and trying to capture the meaning of the client's experience.
8	Focusing	Direct the discussion to the main priority problems faced by the client.
9	Summarizing	Summarize the key points of the session to end or move on to a new topic.

After each simulation session, the facilitator leads a reflective discussion on the accuracy of the verbal and non-verbal responses practiced. The activity is then enriched with a sharing session regarding the obstacles to implementing Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) in their respective schools, as well as consultations on real-life case studies. Several critical cases were discussed in depth with one Guidance and Counseling expert and two SRA Counselors, including: physical bullying; verbal and physical bullying; cyberbullying; cases that have a psychological impact on the victim; as well as handling students who experience severe communication barriers that could lead to them being expelled from school. This series of interventions ends with an evaluation and termination process, in which the final measurement (post-test) was conducted to measure

changes in participant competency scores, which were then analyzed using non-parametric statistics (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study assessed the effectiveness of child protection-based counseling communication training and mentoring interventions by comparing BK teachers' competency scores before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the intervention activities in 12 samples of BK teachers (N=12). The instrument used was a test to evaluate understanding of micro-counseling material consisting of 15 dichotomous questions (scores 0 and 5). The validity of the instrument was reviewed through content validity (content validity) based on expert assessment (expert judgment) by guidance and counseling experts. All 15 items were retained and used in the total score analysis because they represent basic competency indicators that training participants must master, even though several items showed constant bivariate correlations (mastered by all training participants).

Intervention Result Data Description

The effectiveness of the child protection-based counseling communication training and mentoring program was measured on 12 BK teachers (N=12). Summary of descriptive statistics of scores (pre-test and post-test) for participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Scores Pré-Test and Post-Test (N=12)

Measurement	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	(M)	(SD)
Pre-Test	35,00	75,00	62,50	11,38
Post-Test	40,00	75,00	68,75	10,03

Based on Table 1, the average participant score increased by 6.25 points, from 62.50 in the initial condition (pre-test) to 68.75 after the intervention (post-test).

Data Normality Assumption Test

A normality test was conducted to determine the appropriate type of statistical test (parametric or non-parametric) for the participant competency data. Considering the relatively small sample size in this study (N=12), the data distribution test was analyzed using the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Result 4. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test

Variables / Measurements	Statistic (Shapiro-Wilk)	df	Sig. (p-value)	Information
Pretest	.196	12	.200*	Abnormal
Posttest	.342	12	<.001	Abnormal

Based on the Shapiro-Wilk normality test results, the significance value for the pre-test score is 0.025 (statistic=0.836; $p<0.05$) and for the post-test score is <0.001 (statistic=0.532; $p<0.05$). Because the significance value of both variables is below the 0.05 significance level (α=5%), the assumption of normal distribution is not met (the data are not normally distributed). Therefore, the inferential analysis to test the program's effectiveness continues using a non-parametric statistical test, namely the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Difference Hypothesis Test (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test)

The Wilcoxon test *was* used to analyze changes in individual BK teachers' competency scores before and after the activity.

Table 5. Results of Ranking Analysis (Ranks) Test Wilcoxon

Ranks Category	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Negative Ranks (Post<Pre)	1[a]	6,50	6,50
Positive Ranks (Post>Pre)	7[b]	4,21	29,50
Ties (Post=Pre)	4[c]	-	-
Total	12		

Based on the level mapping (ranks) from the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, changes in individual participant competency scores varied in post-intervention responses. The majority of participants, namely 7 guidance and counseling teachers (58.3%), experienced an increase in competency scores (Positive Ranks) with a Mean Rank of 4.21 and Sum of Ranks of 29.50. Meanwhile, 4 BK teachers (33.3%) had a constant score or no change (Ties) between before and after the activity. Meanwhile, 1 BK teacher (8.3%) experienced a decrease in score (Negative Ranks), with Mean Rank = 6.50 and Sum of Ranks = 6.50. The Wilcoxon test measured changes in individual BK teachers' competency scores before and after the activity.

Table 6. Results Test Statistics Test Wilcoxon (Posttest - Pretest)

Statistical Test	Mark
Z	-1.622[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.105

Based on the statistical analysis in Table 2, the calculated Z value was -1.622, with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.105. Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.105. Since the significance value is above the α=0.05 level (p=0.105>0.05), the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted. This indicates that although most participants' descriptive scores increased, the increase in counseling communication competency among BK teachers did not show a statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level.

Discussion

Measuring the intervention's effectiveness began by recording data on the competency of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers before and after the training activities. Before the intervention, initial data confirmed the real conditions in the field: most BK teachers were accustomed to using a directive communication style, hastily giving advice, or acting reactively as school discipline enforcers. The normative and one-way communication style often resulted in BK services in schools being perceived negatively by students, which resulted in low levels of self-referral (*self-referral*) students. The initial findings align with the analysis (Erdiantoro & Nurmalasari, 2025), which states that guidance and counseling teachers' communication patterns in the field are still oriented toward enforcing formal rules. The limitations of these interactional communication strategies have been shown to limit the development of trust-based relationships (*trust-based relationships*) and hinders the creation of a psychologically safe climate (*psychological safety*) for students in school environments (Itzchakov et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2025).

After structured training and mentoring, quantitative evaluation showed an increase in participants' average competency score by 6.25 points, from 62.50 (*pre-test*) to 68.75 (*post-test*). Descriptively, 58.3% of participants (N=7) improved their micro-counseling understanding skills. This improvement was driven by

the training module's effectiveness, based on *experiential learning*, small-group simulation mentoring, and a practical pocketbook on Child-Friendly School (SRA) counseling communication. Based on a theoretical review, positive changes in the group of training participants occurred because the BK teachers began to internalize micro skills (*micro-skills*) such as active listening (*active listening*), reflection of feelings, and validation of emotions, which are the main foundations in building a therapeutic alliance between counselor and client (Uygur, 2026).

Based on the dynamics of the process in the field, participants' involvement in simulations supports the effectiveness of SRA counseling communication skills training. *Role-play included* three roles (counselor, counselee, and *observer*). Through this flow, BK teachers systematically practiced applying 9 counseling skill flows, starting with *attending*, *minimal encouragement*, *paraphrasing*, *reflection of feeling*, *questioning*, *clarification*, *unconditional positive regard* (UPR) & *reflection of meaning*, *focusing*, and *summarizing*. Qualitative findings during the activity indicate that counseling communication skills are not new to the training participants, but rather skills they already use in their daily practice. Therefore, the intervention functions more as a means to *recall and refresh* basic concepts and reflection so the communication style used is always oriented toward the principles of Child-Friendly Schools (SRA).

Training materials that integrate *broaching skills* and *micro-affirmations are* proven to equip BK teachers to actively validate students' life experiences without judging (*unconditional positive regard*) (Boyce-Rosen & Mecadon-Mann, 2023). This sensitivity is strengthened through the use of interactive video simulation media that displays a variety of bullying cases (*bullying,* physical, verbal, *cyberbullying*, and the victim's situation) as a trigger for analysis. When the guidance counselor manages his/her interpersonal communication patterns empathetically after case analysis and simulation, the guidance counselor can provide a supportive function as a *secure base* (secure attachment) that allows children to regulate their emotions and express themselves authentically (*self-disclosure*) without fear of being judged (Akpan et al., 2025; Trang et al., 2024).

Although most training participants showed a descriptive increase, *Wilcoxon test* analyses showed that the change in score was not statistically significant ($Z=-1.622$; $p=0.105>0.05$). The statistical findings also highlight that the limited sample size (N=12) and the presence of participants with constant scores (33.3%) suggest that short-term micro-counseling training requires follow-up through guidance and counseling supervision and regular mentoring to ensure mastery of counseling skills is internalized evenly. In addition, because PkM activities function more as *recall and refreshers*, conceptual understanding scores did not increase drastically. Although the quantitative increase was not statistically significant, this intervention had a real qualitative impact on the climate of partner schools in several key areas.

Transformation of child-friendly counseling communication interactions

Counseling communication interactions transform from a directive, rule-enforcing approach to collaborative dialogue that respects students' rights and positions. Through reflection with the facilitator, training participants no longer view communication merely as a verbal technique, but rather as a means of fostering a sense of security and respect for students' dignity. Implementing supervision enables guidance and counseling teachers to systematically identify practical strengths and barriers, leading to continuous improvement in service quality. Through constructive feedback, guidance and counseling teachers are encouraged to reflect deeply on their communication practices, ultimately increasing their confidence in addressing individual needs more responsively (Asyifah et al., 2024; Firmansyah et al., 2025). Furthermore, integrating a professional development system that emphasizes needs-based services in the field has been

shown to substantially improve the achievement of guidance and counseling service objectives (Babuta & Rahmat, 2019; Sari et al., 2021).

Deconstruction of negative stigma and case handling *real-life*

Changes in the BK teacher's humanistic communication style have helped erode reactive stigma, encouraging students to participate actively and access services voluntarily (*self-referral*). The paradigm transformation was clearly visible in the case consultation session of junior high school students with 1 Guidance and Counseling expert and 2 BK Teachers/SRA Counselors, namely the case of bullying (physical and verbal); cyberbullying cases; cases that have a psychological impact on the victim; and handling students who experience maladaptive communication barriers, potentially leading to expulsion. Guidance counselors are trained to handle real-life cases of students experiencing severe communication barriers and facing expulsion. Rather than rushing to impose reactive sanctions, guidance counselors are encouraged to assess needs, build empathetic dialogue, and prioritize students' rights and best interests.

Empowering students against bullying

Through assertive communication training and prosocial mentoring, guidance counselors can help shift students from mere spectators (*bystanders*) to active advocates (*active defenders*) in school bullying dynamics. In addition to the direct impact on BK teachers and students at partner schools, the involvement of UNJ Guidance and Counseling Students in the small group mentoring process and research data processing also supports the achievement of the University's main performance indicators (IKU 3 and IKU 5) while realizing the principles of Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM). Overall, the PkM intervention has proven practical and educationally capable of initiating a transformation in counselor communication patterns to realize a Safe and Child-Friendly School (SRA) climate in Bekasi City.

This approach has been shown to help teachers translate theoretical knowledge into more innovative and collaborative pedagogical practices in the counseling room (Nadhirah et al. 2024: 7; Musaddad and Baidawi 2025). School leadership support in providing space for collaborative supervision is key in maintaining a culture of reflection and teacher commitment to continuous service quality improvement (Ramadhoni et al. 2024; Azila et al. 2025). This capacity building aligns with findings that mentoring and clinical supervision approaches significantly help teachers design service programs that are more contextual and adaptive to student characteristics (Muamar et al. 2024; SARI 2024; Abel et al. 2025). Structured supervision mechanisms, such as collegial discussions and ongoing consultations, have been shown to validate improvements in teacher performance in developing service program plans that align with students' actual needs (Karsono 2016: 124; PGRI et al. 2022: 69).

Limitations and Recommendations

Based on the analysis, qualitative findings, and limitations, several strategic recommendations were formulated to strengthen the program's sustainability. For the Guidance and Counseling Teachers' Conference (MGBK) and the Bekasi City Education Office, it is recommended to collaborate on this structured mentoring on an ongoing basis in other Education Sub-Departments, with a primary emphasis on organizing post-training clinical supervision so that the internalization of child-friendly counseling communication skills is realized evenly across all school units. At the school policy level, school management needs to institutionalize the child-friendly communication framework and the use of practical pocketbooks into official policies (*institutional policy*) in schools to facilitate sustainable multicomponent interventions to prevent bullying and marginalization of students. Finally, for program developers and future researchers, it is recommended to

expand the scope by increasing the number of research samples and implementing a longitudinal test design. A longitudinal approach is crucial for observing the long-term impact of improving counselor communication competencies on changes in school climate, student self-efficacy, and the effectiveness of handling specific cases such as *cyberbullying*.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis results, normality test*s (Shapiro-Wilk)* confirm that the data are not normally distributed ($p<0.05$), so hypothesis testing was carried out using the W*ilcoxon signed-rank test. The* statistical test yielded a Z value of -1.622 with $p=0.105$ ($p>0.05$). These results indicate that, statistically, the increase in counseling communication competency scores of BK teachers post-intervention did not differ significantly at the 95% confidence level. This is reasonable, considering that the main function of the activity for experienced training participants is to *recall and refresh skills*. However, descriptively and practically, the PkM intervention program is based on *experiential learning*. This has been shown to positively impact most participants (58.3% experienced an increase in scores). Mastery of the flow of 9 child-friendly micro-counseling skills (such as*attending*, *minimal encouragement*, *paraphrasing*, *reflection of feeling*, *questioning*, *clarification*, upr, *focusing*, And *summarizing*) with practical pocket book guide and video media*bullying*proven to initiate a paradigm shift in BK services, which were initially reactive and directive, to services that are more humanistic, responsive, preventive, and able to provide a safe space (*safe space*) for students.

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