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Relationship between sources of counseling self-efficacy and counseling self-efficacy among Malaysian school counselors

Pei Boon Ooi^{a,b,*}, Wan Marzuki Bin Wan Jaafar^b, Maznah Binti Baba^b

^a Sunway University, Malaysia

^b Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

School counselors' role in the formation and transformation of the Malaysian education system is indispensable. This study employs the Social Cognitive Theory to examine the relationship between the sources of counseling self-efficacy and the Malaysian school counselors' counseling self-efficacy. The Sources of Counseling Self-Efficacy questionnaire and the Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory were used on 541 school counselors nationwide, as the respondents. The result reveals mastery experience has the strongest relationship with counseling self-efficacy. Recommendations on how to strengthen self-efficacy are proposed.

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1. Introduction

The role of school counselors has evolved and transformed over the years, in Malaysia and in the Western countries (Wilde, Park & Lee, 2013). In 1963, the Malaysian Ministry of Education implemented the idea of having guidance teachers in schools but the idea was aborted due to financial limitation and human resources constraint (See & Ng, 2010). In the year 2000, another milestone was achieved by the counseling profession when it became mandatory for every secondary school in Malaysia to have at least one full-time counselor. The school counselor job is to focus solely on guidance and counseling services without the additional teaching workload. The Parliament of Malaysia enacted the Counselor Act 1998 (Act 580, Commissioner of Law Revision) in the year 1998. This provision boosted the confidence of the community in sourcing for legitimate counseling services.

The self-efficacy concept received considerable attention over the past 30 years and was widely studied since Albert Bandura introduced the term in 1986. From a personal and professional development perspective, the concept of self-efficacy is positively associated with self-regulations (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994), self-concept (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003) and mastery goal orientation to influence academic performance outcomes (Fenollar, Roman & Cuestas, 2007; Stajkovic & Sommer, 2000). Self-efficacy belief also predicts the individual's major career decision and career choice and is associated with key motivation variables such as job satisfaction. For instance, a lower level of self-efficacy denotes a lower level of job satisfaction and a higher level of job stress (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Career researchers who studied self-efficacy reported that self-efficacy is correlated with job search planning and job search behavior (Fort, Jacquet, & Leroy, 2011), career indecision among high school students (Argyropoulou, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, & Besevegis, 2007), and career counseling attitude (Al-Darmaki, 2012).

Bandura (1997) suggests that individuals constructed their self-efficacy beliefs from four primary sources: enac-

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: peiboonoioi@hotmail.com (P.B. Ooi), wanmarzuki@upm.edu.my (W.M.B. Wan Jaafar), mazb@upm.edu.my (M.B. Baba).

tive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and affective state. Numerous studies focused on the correlation or sources of self-efficacy's outcomes, but relatively few examined the actual sources. There are various measurements constructed to measure the four sources in different domains. However, to the researcher's best knowledge, none of the measurements examined the sources of self-efficacy in the counseling domain.

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1989, 1990), humans are capable of forming, filtering, and deciding their course of actions via triadic reciprocity within the behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors and environmental events. The behavior is predictable and reciprocally influenced by both cognitive and environment determinants (Sawyer, Peters, & Willis, 2013). The study by Ooi, Wan Jaafar, and Baba (2016) suggests that counselors registered with the Malaysia Board of Counselor display a higher level of counseling self-efficacy and a higher level of job satisfaction, self-perceived employability, career success, and professional commitment. Thus, it is imperative to study the relationship between the four sources and counseling self-efficacy from the self-belief perspective.

1.1. Self-efficacy belief

The most common construct being studied in Social Cognitive Theory studies is self-efficacy beliefs and within the central construct of the beliefs lies the specific and general self-efficacy constructs. The specific self-efficacy construct has been widely used and developed to measure various domains such as job search self-efficacy (Lahuis, 2005) and the Teacher Self-Efficacy (Palmer, 2011). On the other hand, under the general self-efficacy construct, numerous general scales have been developed, such as social self-efficacy (Workplace Social Self-Efficacy (Fan et al., 2013)), occupational self-efficacy (Rigotti, Schyns, & Mohr, 2008), and youth self-efficacy (Warren & Salazar, 2014).

Various counseling self-efficacy scales have been developed to measure its different domains. An instrument to measure racial diversity was developed by Sawyer, Peters, and Willis (2013). The Counselor's Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES) aims to measure the beginner master level counseling students' willingness to conduct counseling session and to support clients during a crisis. The scale has 42 items with four subscales: (a) crisis situation (13 items), (b) basic counseling skills (15 items), (c) therapeutic response to crisis and post-crisis (8 items), and (d) unconditional positive regard (6 items). The reliability coefficient ranging from .96 to .98 suggested that perceived self-efficacy and preparedness to handle crisis are correlated. Acknowledging the different needs of elementary, middle, and high school counselors' self-efficacy, Can (2010) developed and validated the Elementary School Counselors' Self-Efficacy beliefs (ESCSE) with three main factors, namely counseling, consultation, and coordination. Each factor accounted for 25%, 19% and 17% of the total variance, respectively. The 21-item Scale reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .92 and a test-retest of .82 and was deemed valid to measure self-

efficacy beliefs of the elementary school counselors. The original 31 items were reduced to 21 items that met the criteria after the principle component analysis and repeated varimax rotation operation.

1.2. Sources of self-efficacy

The four sources of information efficacy in which self-efficacy is learned are (1) mastery experience, (2) social persuasion, (3) vicarious learning, and (4) physiological and anxiety state. The mastery experience or the performance accomplishment refers to how people act on their efficacy beliefs and assess the adequacy of their self-appraisal from their achieved performance (Bandura, 1997, p. 81). This is the most influential source of efficacy information (Bandura, 1997). Past success in performing counseling activities will elevate the efficacy appraisal; repeated failures would inflict the efficacy appraisal, especially if this happens in the early stage of counseling and could not be explained by the amount of effort invested or affected by external circumstances. Social persuasion, which encompasses both verbal and non-verbal feedbacks and judgment received from others cultivate one's beliefs in one's ability to perform duties and activities (Britner & Pajares, 2006). However, social persuasion alone is insufficient to sustain the effect of increasing one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Social persuasion was found to modestly contribute to the prediction of academic grade and courses of self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2009). One's beliefs are easily weakened by the negative appraisal or bad comments received.

The third source, vicarious experience, was reported as the strongest predictor of self-efficacy for self-regulated learning (Usher & Pajares, 2009). Vicarious experience is less influential in the presence of mastery experience (Britner & Pajares, 2006) but heavily relied on when one has limited experience or knowledge in the tasks or activities that others performed. The physiological and anxiety states, such as anxiety, stress, mood states, and stimulation also provide efficacy information. One depends on information gathered from one's physiological state in forming a judgment on one's abilities and capabilities. Pain, fatigues, stress, tension, and windedness or any perceived negative arousal prevent success and prohibit positive desired outcomes. In a nutshell, one may interpret the internal state differently depending on one past experience in managing similar tasks or activities, the complexity of the tasks, and how others perform such tasks. Some may dwell on internal sensory whilst some may be more externally driven (Bandura, 1997).

1.3. Counseling self-efficacy

Counseling self-efficacy (CSE) which stemmed from SCT is defined as "one's beliefs or judgments about her/his capability to effectively counsel clients in the near future (Larson & Daniels, 1998). It is not about the degree, credential, year of experience one has, or the counseling skills and techniques one possesses; but one's self-beliefs in conducting counseling-related activities, such as individual counseling, group counseling, and development programs. It is important to note that a CSE scale does not measure

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