



A Needs Assessment of Guidance and Counselling Services in Vocational High Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the implementation of student needs assessment as a foundation for the development of guidance and counselling services in vocational high schools. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method, with School Counsellors at Diponegoro Vocational High School in Depok as subjects, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis, based on the needs assessment theory of Gysbers and Henderson. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that a needs assessment at Diponegoro Vocational High School has been conducted; however, it has not yet reached an optimal level. The main limitations include insufficient time, an unbalanced counsellor-to-student ratio, the absence of official guidelines and systemic support that has not been met. As a result, the needs assessment tends to be reactive and does not fully address students' comprehensive needs, especially in the career domain. This condition leads to guidance and counselling programs that have not fully addressed students' actual needs in the personal, social, academic, and career domains. The findings of this study provide a basis for developing policies to improve School Counsellors' competence through standardised, contextually relevant training programs in needs assessment.

Keywords: guidance and counseling, Gysbers and Henderson Model, needs assessment

INTRODUCTION

Education, in essence, is a conscious and planned process aimed at developing students' potential comprehensively, encompassing intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and skill-based dimensions (Savitz-Romer et al., 2018). The effort to develop students' potential is closely linked to the quality of the educational system and the learning strategies applied within the educational environment (Ellen et al., 2018). Therefore, the learning process should be designed not merely to transmit

knowledge but also as a means of character building, development of 21st-century competencies, and reinforcement of national and humanistic values (Martinez-Bravo et al., 2022).

One essential component supporting the achievement of educational objectives is guidance and counselling services. These services constitute an integral part of the education system, embedded within students' school life (Harrison et al., 2023). According to Gysbers and Henderson (2014), guidance and counselling programs are comprehensive, systematic, and developmentally oriented, designed to help students achieve maturity across personal, social, academic, and career domains. Within these services, School Counsellors act as program managers and student advocates, responsible for delivering planned, measurable, and continuous service (Yulizar et al., 2023).

Guidance and counselling are not merely activities that address students' problems but constitute a system for developing students' potential, supporting all aspects of their school life (Sheperis et al., 2023). Gysbers and Henderson (2014) emphasize four main components in guidance and counseling programs: 1) basic guidance services, assisting students in developing self-awareness, moral values, and life skills; 2) responsive services, providing immediate assistance for students' problems; 3) individual planning, focusing on students' academic and career goal development; and 4) system support, involving collaboration with teachers, parents, and the school community to create a healthy and productive learning environment.

Within the Gysbers and Henderson model, needs assessment serves as the primary foundation for designing relevant and contextualised guidance services, enabling guidance and counselling programs to function optimally in supporting students' holistic development (Parzych et al., 2023). A needs assessment in guidance and counselling aims to provide a clear understanding of students' conditions

and deliver accurate, relevant information about their backgrounds and social environments. This process involves collecting and analysing data on students to understand their needs, potential, and developmental aspects (Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2022).

By conducting a needs assessment, counsellors can identify students' individual needs in depth. Various techniques, such as interviews, psychological tests, observations, and questionnaires, can be used to explore students' strengths, weaknesses, interests, talents, and challenges (Romiaty et al., 2023). Such a comprehensive understanding enables counsellors to provide effective services tailored to students' needs (Muiz & Fitriani, 2022). Furthermore, needs assessment can identify gaps between students' actual conditions and expected standards (Hughes et al., 2022). Understanding these gaps allows schools to design appropriate interventions to enhance learning processes while promoting students' independence and readiness for post-school challenges.

Needs assessment is particularly urgent in vocational high schools, as students are in a transitional phase toward either the workforce or further education (Vermeire et al., 2022). Vocational students are required not only to master academic and vocational competencies but also to be prepared for complex personal and social challenges (Sulistiobudi & Kadiyono, 2023). Therefore, needs assessment plays a critical role as an initial diagnostic tool for mapping students' actual conditions across the four main domains: personal, social, academic, and career. By comprehensively understanding students' specific needs, School Counsellors can design appropriate services, such as individual counselling, soft skills training, career planning, and other preventive interventions (Nasution, 2021).

Preliminary studies at the research site indicate that some School Counsellors still lack a thorough understanding of the fundamental

concepts for designing student-centred guidance and counselling programs. This condition makes it difficult for teachers to prepare a Guidance and Counselling Service Implementation Plan (RPLBK) based on the results of the needs assessment, leading to suboptimal delivery of guidance services (Goodman-Scott & Eckhoff, 2020). This highlights a gap between the ideal concept of needs–assessment–based guidance programs and actual practices in the field. Based on this issue, the present study aims to explore the practices of needs assessment conducted by School Counsellors in vocational high schools and to identify the challenges faced in designing comprehensive and adaptive service programs.

RESEARCH METHODS

Approaches and Types of Research

This study employed a qualitative case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of needs assessment conducted by School Counsellors for students (Tague, 2018). The study focused on four main aspects that define the scope of guidance and counselling services: personal, social, academic, and career, as outlined in the comprehensive guidance and counselling model by Gysbers and Henderson.

Research Subject

The subjects of this study were School Counsellors at Diponegoro Vocational High School in Depok, Yogyakarta. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves determining informants based on active involvement in assessment activities and a minimum of 2 years of professional experience in guidance and counselling in a vocational school environment. (Sugiyono, 2018). Two School Counsellors were selected because they play a direct role in the needs assessment process

and the development of the guidance and counselling service program. Researchers also conducted interviews with three homeroom teachers and five students, who were selected as significant figures to enrich the data. However, the primary focus remained on School Counsellors' experiences and strategies for implementing needs assessments. This location selection was based on the results of a preliminary study that indicated the need to improve guidance and counselling teacher strategies in implementing needs assessments as a basis for developing effective service programs.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher, who was responsible for collecting, interpreting, and analysing field data (Sugiyono, 2018). A supplementary instrument in the form of a semi-structured interview guide, which is arranged based on the theory of Gysbers and Henderson (2014), covering the personal, social, academic, and career aspects. This guide was designed to gather in-depth information regarding the implementation of student needs assessments and their utilisation in developing guidance and counselling programs. Example questions included: *“How do you implement student needs assessments in this vocational school, what methods are used, and how are the results utilised in designing guidance and counselling programs?”* and *“What challenges do you encounter in planning and implementing students’ needs assessments?”* All interviews were conducted face-to-face at the school, recorded with the informants’ consent, and transcribed to ensure data accuracy and credibility. In addition to interviews, the researcher employed observation sheets to record the practices of needs assessment and the dynamics of guidance and counselling service delivery, as well as administrative documentation such as RPLBK (Guidance and Counselling Service Implementation Plans), assessment instruments, and assessment result reports as supporting data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify, examine, and organise patterns or key themes emerging from interviews, observations, and documentation data (Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis procedure involved several stages: 1) Data reduction, selecting and focusing on relevant information according to the research objectives; 2) Data display, organising data into narratives and matrices to facilitate interpretation; 3) Conclusion drawing/verification, interpreting the meaning of the themes to answer the research focus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was conducted interactively and iteratively throughout the study, ensuring consistency between the data, findings, and interpretations. Data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentation results to produce credible and scientifically accountable findings.

RESEARCH RESULT

Exploration of the Implementation of Student Needs Assessment

Interviews revealed that School Counsellors have conducted needs assessments holistically and adaptively, although they face time constraints in providing services and a high counsellor-to-student ratio, with only two School Counsellors available at the school.

Personal Aspect

In the personal domain, emotional pressure was identified as a major concern, particularly for students facing family problems, such as parental divorce or economic pressures. These conditions often affect students' psychological well-being and readiness to engage in learning processes, as stated by School Counsellor 1:

"On average, many students come from broken homes. Some have divorced parents, and some parents are busy working. The impact

is clearly visible at school; they become easily emotional, unfocused, and quickly fatigued while learning. We often have to approach them individually to truly understand what they are feeling." (School Counsellor 1)

School Counsellor 2 added:

"Some students feel shy or afraid to share directly at school. I usually communicate via WhatsApp. From chats, we can tell if they are stressed, and then adjust our approach sometimes brief counseling, sometimes routine motivation." (School Counsellor 2)

Findings in the personal domain form the basis for needs assessment in the social and academic aspects. By understanding students' emotional conditions first, School Counsellors can more easily evaluate students' behaviour and social interaction patterns within the school environment. Furthermore, comprehension of the personal domain helps teachers enhance student engagement in the learning process. In practice, students who feel safe and trusted by their counsellors tend to be more open and responsive in both social interactions and learning activities.

Social Aspect

A needs assessment in the social domain indicated that some students face difficulties interacting with peers, such as low self-confidence in social situations or involvement in minor conflicts at school. This finding shows that social relationship dynamics among students remain a concern in guidance and counselling services, as noted by School Counsellor 2:

"We observe students during school activities and on WhatsApp groups. Active students usually have no problems, but those who are quiet or withdrawn need special attention." (School Counsellor 2)

Additionally, School Counsellor 1 mentioned that limited time for delivering guidance services makes social assessment less systematic:

"Since there is no dedicated class time for counseling, social assessment is mostly conducted indirectly, so documentation and follow-up tend to be ad hoc." (School Counsellor 1)

These findings indicate that in the needs assessment process, School Counsellors rely heavily on reports from subject teachers and non-participant observation records to obtain an overview of students' social conditions. Although this limits systematic assessment, established personal relationships between counsellors and students help teachers link social findings with emotional pressures, providing a more comprehensive understanding of student conditions.

Academic Aspect

In the academic domain, needs assessment conducted by School Counsellors focuses on learning behaviours, such as motivation, discipline, and deviant behaviour. In contrast, academic performance evaluation remains the responsibility of subject teachers. In this process, School Counsellors identify factors causing decreased learning behaviours, as explained by School Counsellor 1:

"We focus on learning motivation, discipline, and deviant behavior. If grades drop significantly or learning behavior is poor, we intervene. The rest is evaluated by subject teachers." (School Counsellor 1)

According to School Counsellor 2, the implementation of needs assessment in the academic domain is reactive due to limited service time. Teachers often respond to academic issues after receiving reports from class guardians, but the information-gathering process is not yet structured or consistent, resulting in suboptimal academic risk mapping.

Career Aspect

In the career domain, needs assessment is conducted individually, taking into account each student's plans (whether to enter the workforce directly or continue higher education before pursuing a career). School

Counsellor 2 stated that this approach facilitates understanding students' interests, potential, and readiness to determine their career paths according to their individual conditions and needs:

"Some students want to work immediately, while others want to pursue higher education. We help them weigh their options based on family circumstances and socio-economic realities. For example, discussing internship opportunities that could lead to jobs after graduation." (School Counsellor 2)

Challenges Faced by School Counsellor in Conducting Needs Assessment

The interview results also revealed several obstacles faced by guidance and counselling teachers in conducting needs assessments, which affected the quality of services provided to students.

Time Constraints and Counselor-to-Student Ratio

The first challenge is the limited time available to deliver guidance services at school. According to School Counsellor 1, time limitations prevent in-depth needs assessment:

"Since counseling does not have dedicated class hours, we rarely see students directly. Our focus is usually on prominent cases. Many students with minor or hidden problems are not addressed." (School Counsellor 1)

Furthermore, School Counsellor 2 added that the high counsellor-to-student ratio is another barrier:

"One counselor handles over 300 students. We have to prioritize. Unfortunately, students whose problems are not obvious often get overlooked." (School Counsellor 2)

This imbalance affects needs assessment across all aspects, from personal to career, leaving some students in need of preventive services unserved.

Availability of Official Guidelines for Needs Assessment

The second challenge is the absence of official guidelines for conducting a needs assessment. This results in assessment processes being flexible, adapted to the situation and each counsellor's creativity, as stated by both teachers:

"There is no official guideline from the Education Office. Our evaluation is based on experience, reports from other teachers, and informal communication. Without standardized instruments, we constantly adjust our methods to remain relevant." (School Counsellor 2)

"The absence of a standard format makes it difficult to systematize assessments. We want a more structured process, but we still rely on our own creativity and experience." (School Counsellor 1)

Systemic Support from the School

The third challenge relates to the limited systemic support from the school. School Counsellor 1 emphasised that supportive school policies are essential for conducting more optimal assessments:

"We want assessments to be more comprehensive and systematic, but we need training, official guidelines, and school support." (School Counsellor 1)

School Counsellor 2 added that information gathering is currently limited to manual notes and informal communication. Therefore, systemic support from the school is crucial to facilitate the implementation of student needs assessment:

"If we had official guidelines and supporting technology, we could monitor students more effectively, including those with hidden difficulties. This would significantly improve the quality of guidance services." (School Counsellor 2)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that School Counsellors at Diponegoro Vocational High School in Depok still rely on intuitive

assessments and informal reports. This condition reflects a weak data management component within guidance and counselling services. A valid and well-documented assessment data management system enables counsellors to identify trends in students' issues, prioritise interventions, and adjust programs according to the school context. According to the American School Counselor Association (2019), the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services depends on four key components: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. However, most guidance and counselling activities at this school remain focused on responsive services due to time and personnel constraints. This finding is supported by Prikhidko and Swank (2018), who reported that the implementation of comprehensive guidance and counselling services continues to face various difficulties, including time constraints, high resource requirements, and challenges in systematic program management and evaluation. These conditions highlight that the success of guidance and counselling services depends not only on program design but also on structural support, policies, and the school's capacity to optimally integrate all service components (Nagy et al., 2021).

Comprehensive guidance and counselling services cannot function effectively without a flexible and responsive education system. Schools need to establish policies that integrate guidance and counselling programs with learning activities to ensure continuity between students' academic, personal, social, and career development (Hidayat, 2021). School curricula should also provide clear space for group counselling, student needs assessment, and advocacy services to enable School Counsellors to perform their roles optimally (Muiz & Fitriani, 2022). This collaborative approach has been shown to create a more supportive learning environment focused on students' well-being.

The utilisation of digital technology is also a key factor in strengthening needs assessment. Information systems in guidance and counselling services enable counsellors to systematically map student needs, document service development, and improve communication and data management within schools (Nurbaeti & Herdi, 2021). These findings align with research by Widyaningtyas et al. (2021), which states that database-based information systems in guidance and counselling services assist counsellors in analysing students' needs through structured data, thereby supporting more precise and effective program planning. E-counselling has emerged as a strategic alternative for students with time constraints or barriers to attending face-to-face services (Putri, 2023). With technological support, guidance, and counselling services can become more adaptive, responsive, and data-driven.

Besides the utilisation of digital technology in guidance and counselling services, a humanistic approach based on interpersonal relationships is also key to successful student needs assessment. Principles of empathy, genuineness, and unconditional acceptance help build effective and meaningful counselling relationships (Elliott et al., 2018). This aligns with findings that emphasise that counsellors' personal qualities, such as empathy and acceptance, play an important role in fostering warm relationships and making students more open to expressing their needs (Rufaedah & Ikhwanarrafiq, 2022). International studies have also shown that strong interpersonal relationships between counsellors and students, characterised by empathy, emotional support, and authenticity, significantly increase students' engagement and interest in guidance and counselling services (Wheeler et al., 2021). Using this approach, needs assessment becomes not only a reflection of individual needs but also a strategic instrument for decision-making in the development of guidance and counselling programs.

Despite the benefits of the humanistic approach, School Counsellors face several difficulties that limit the effectiveness of needs assessment. Resource constraints, limited time, and lack of technical guidelines are the main factors that hinder optimal implementation of needs assessment (Hadiarni & Shaqhira, 2023). The absence of a documentation system makes objective assessment difficult, resulting in selective, reactive service delivery. This situation creates a risk of service inequality, where students with hidden needs receive less attention, while those with prominent issues are prioritised.

Moreover, School Counsellors' involvement in academic and career domains remains low. This emphasises the need for a collaborative approach among subject teachers, class guardians, and school management, as highlighted in the Comprehensive Guidance Program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2014). Collaboration is crucial to ensure that assessment covers all aspects of student development (personal, social, academic, and career). Regular communication forums, evaluation meetings, and the use of integrated assessment instruments are important strategies to improve data integration and guidance and counselling service planning (Muiz & Fitriani, 2022).

Another difficulty is the limited number of School Counsellors compared to the number of students. With over 300 students and only two School Counsellors, service delivery is highly constrained and tends to focus on visible problems. Implementing guidance and counselling services in secondary schools often faces time and capacity constraints, making it difficult for counsellors to reach all students effectively. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of standard technical guidelines, leading to informal practices that rely heavily on personal experience (Bidayah et al., 2023). Without clear standards, assessment becomes subjective and inconsistent, complicating overall program evaluation. This highlights the need to develop standardised assessment instruments

that can be used across schools and domains, facilitating integration of assessment results into school management systems (Wibowo, 2021). By strengthening School Counsellors' competencies, providing assessment guidelines, and enhancing cross-sector collaboration, these difficulties can be mitigated. Transforming the paradigm of guidance and counselling services from reactive to proactive and preventive not only enables more comprehensive identification of students' needs but also enhances the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programs sustainably, making needs assessment a strategic basis for decision-making in the development of school guidance services (Shannonhouse et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented above, the practice of student needs assessment at Diponegoro Vocational High School in Depok has been conducted holistically and adaptively across personal, social, academic, and career domains. However, the assessments remain intuitive and reactive, relying heavily on informal reports and limited observation, resulting in guidance and counselling services that are more case-oriented than preventive or developmental. Various structural and technical obstacles, such as limited service hours, an imbalanced counsellor-to-student ratio, the absence of standardised instruments, and the lack of a structured documentation system, make it difficult to conduct assessments systematically and sustainably. Limited cross-sector collaboration, particularly in the academic and career domains, also restricts the optimisation of School Counsellors' roles in planning comprehensive programs. The limitations of this study include the small number of informants, which may not fully represent the perspectives of students or school management. Given these limitations, future research is recommended to involve a larger, more diverse sample of informants to gain a more comprehensive understanding of needs assessment practices

in guidance and counselling services. Overall, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to strengthening proactive, preventive, data-driven guidance and counselling systems within educational settings.

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