

# IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICE TO STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN SELANGOR

Hanani Harun Rasit, Hasnah Toran, & Salleh Amat

National University of Malaysia

Malaysia

*Guidance and counselling services are important for all students. The comprehensive model, which is the basis for the guidance and counselling services in Malaysian schools, proposes that the services should be extended to every student. This study is aimed at identifying the level of implementation as well as the various hindrances faced in the implementation of both the counselling service and guidance service for students with special needs in secondary schools of Selangor which offer the Special Education Integration Program (Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi). Thirty-eight heads of the guidance and counselling units responded to the questionnaire. This study found that both the counselling service and the guidance service are implemented at the moderate level, where 57% of the counsellors implement the counselling service and 55.4% of the counsellors implement the guidance service for special needs students. The three major hindrances perceived by the counsellors as hampering wide extension to the special needs students are: the absence of guidelines on how to implement the service; the lack of skills to provide the service to the special needs students; and the lack of knowledge about the special needs students. Implications of the study in terms of the school counsellors' training and the need for a guideline on the implementation are discussed.*

**Keywords:** School counselling, special needs students, guidance and counselling service

The guidance and counselling services are for all students including those with special needs (ASCA Delegate Assembly, 2003). School counsellors should work with the special needs students and include them in the guidance and counselling services (Trenhaile, 2007). The comprehensive model which is the foundation of the guidance and counselling services in Malaysian schools proposes that the services are for every student in the school (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1993). In implementing the guidance and counselling services ethically, school counsellors should accept all students without any conditions and should not discriminate or allow discriminations to happen to students because of

race, gender, religion, ideological status, and physical or mental disabilities (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2009). The school guidance and counselling services, therefore, are inclusive and they include every student in the school either typical or special needs students.

Special needs students in this study refer to three categories of students who are enrolled in the Malaysian secondary schools. They are identified as students with visual impairment, students with hearing impairment and students with learning disabilities (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2008). Special needs students have been in the Malaysian school system alongside the typical students since the 1960s via the integration program (Norshidah, Aliza, & Zalizan, 2009). This integration program adopts the inclusion approach which practises the total exclusion, partial inclusion or total inclusion (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2008). The total exclusion approach is a practice where special needs students are placed in a special classroom or in a special school. Opportunities for interaction and learning with mainstream students and teachers are non-existent. Partial inclusion, on the other hand, is a practice where special needs students are placed in a special classroom with opportunities for them to join certain classes taught by the mainstream teachers and participate in certain activities with typical students. A practice where special needs students are placed in the mainstream classroom together with the typical students where they participate in all the activities together with their typical counterparts is the total inclusion approach (Norshidah, Aliza & Zalizan, 2009). Throughout Malaysia there are 10,868 special needs students who are currently enrolled in 616 secondary schools which have the integration program (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2008). Partial inclusion is the approach adopted by all of the secondary schools in this study.

The special needs students have unique academic and personal-social needs. They face various difficulties related to their disabilities such as high stress and anxiety, poor social skills, low self-esteem, negative school experiences and the ineffective use of anger management strategies (Frye, 2005; McEachern, 2003; Zalizan, 2009). Previous studies show that special needs students require guidance and counselling services to help them meet their unique needs related to their disabilities (Azharizah, Sabariah, & Salleh, 2010; Manisah, Ramlee, & Zalizan, 2006; Ramlee, 2004; Shapiee @ Shafiee, 2002).

A few studies on the implementation of the school guidance and counselling services focused only on the service for the typical students (Hanani, 2005; Salwa, 2004 Suradi, 2000). Very little is known about the implementation of the guidance and counselling services for special needs students in schools except for the study on the counsellors' readiness to provide the services for the special needs students and the counsellors' needs for training to work with the special needs students (Azharizah & Salleh, 2011). Thus, a study to give a preliminary picture of the implementation of the guidance and counselling services to special needs students is needed.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to identify the level of implementation of the guidance and counselling services to students with special needs, namely, the counselling service and the guidance service. This study also seeks to identify the hindrances faced by school counsellors in implementing both of these services to students with special needs. Specifically this study aims at answering these research questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of the school counsellors?
2. What is the level of implementation of the counselling service for the special needs students?
3. What is the level of implementation of the guidance service for the special needs students?
4. What are the hindrances in implementing the guidance and counselling services for the special needs students?

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

This is a survey study to identify and describe the implementation of the guidance and counselling services by school counsellors for students with special needs. A survey study using a questionnaire is employed as it enables data collection to be carried out only at one time (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

### **Sample**

Sixty (60) school counsellors who are the Heads of the Guidance and Counselling Units from sixty (60) secondary schools which offer the Special Education Integration Program in Selangor form the accessible population of this study. Thirty eight (38) school counsellors responded to the questionnaire. These school counsellors were chosen as respondents as they are the coordinators of their school guidance and counselling services. They are responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating the activities for the school guidance and counselling services. As Heads of Guidance and Counselling Units, their answers to the questionnaire are more likely to be the representation of their school's implementation of guidance and counselling services as a whole.

### **Instrument**

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Suradi (1993) and the author's consent for adaptation was obtained via email. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part is on the



demographic information while the second part is on the implementation of the guidance and counselling services. The second part comprises eleven (11) sections. The third part of the questionnaire is on the hindrances in implementing the guidance and counselling services to the students with special needs.

Five (5) activities are listed as items on the implementation of the counselling service and three (3) activities are listed as items on the implementation of the guidance service. The counselling activities are "Providing individual counselling", "Providing group counselling", "Providing career counselling", "Providing family counselling", and "Providing crisis counselling". Meanwhile, the guidance activities are "Providing group guidance activities", "Providing individual guidance activities" and "Providing guidance class activities". The respondents were instructed to choose either 1-Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3- Unsure; 4-Agree; and 5-Strongly Agree to indicate whether they implement the counselling and guidance activities. Choosing 1-Strongly Disagree or 2-Disagree means that the activity is not implemented, while choosing 4-Agree or 5-Strongly Agree indicates that the activity is being implemented.

The third section on the hindrances in implementing the guidance and counselling services to the students with special needs has eight items. These are on the possible hindrances which are "Absence of a guideline on how to implement the services to special needs students", "Lack of skills to provide the services to special needs students", "Lack of knowledge about special needs students", "Heavy workload with typical students", "No referral from special education teachers", "No specific instruction that guidance and counselling services should be provided for special needs students", "Guidance and counselling services are provided by the special education teachers". The respondents were instructed to choose three items that they consider to be major hindrances in the implementation of the guidance and counselling services for students with special needs.

Sixty questionnaires were distributed to sixty secondary schools in Selangor which offer the Special Education Integration Program and thirty eight questionnaires (63.3%) were returned.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed and tabulated using the Version 18.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. For the demographic information, the respondents' answers were calculated using the frequency count and the percentage. In order to determine the level of implementation of the counselling service and the guidance service, the respondents' responses were calculated and the mean scores were determined for each service and the activities under each service. The interpretation of the mean scores was as the following (Bahaman & Turiman, 1999):

Table 1  
*The Interpretation of the Mean Scores*

Mean Score Range	Interpretation (Level of Implementation)
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.66	Moderate
3.67 – 5.00	High

As for the hindrances in implementing the guidance and counselling services, the respondents’ responses were calculated using the frequency count and the percentage.

**RESULTS**

**Demographic Profiles**

The respondents in this study were eight (8) male and thirty (30) female school counsellors. Eight (8) of them have less than five years working experience as counsellors and thirty (30) of them have been school counsellors for more than five years. Majority of the respondents hold a Bachelor’s Degree in Counselling (30) while four (4) respondents hold a Master’s Degree in Counselling. One respondent has a diploma and one has a certificate in counselling. As for the training received on special needs students, seven (7) respondents indicated that they have the training while 31 counsellors were not trained at all. Three (3) respondents were trained on counselling special needs students while 35 counsellors were not trained at all.

Regarding the categories of special needs students in the respondents’ caseloads; twenty five (25) respondents have students with learning disabilities in their caseload. Six (6) respondents have students who are visually impaired and students with learning disabilities in their caseloads. Four (4) respondents have students who are hearing impaired and learning disabilities in their caseloads. Two respondents have students with hearing impairment and one respondent has students with dyslexia in her caseload. Table 2 summarizes the demographic profiles of the respondents.

**Table 2**  
*The Demographic Profiles of the School Counsellors*

Profiles	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	8	21.1
	Female	30	78.9
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	8	21.1
	More than 5 years	30	78.9
Counselling Qualification	Master's	4	10.5
	Bachelor	30	78.9
	Diploma	1	2.6
	Certificate	1	2.6
	Not Stated	2	5.3
Training on special needs students	Yes	7	18.4
	No	31	81.6
Training on counselling special needs student	Yes	3	7.9
	No	35	92.1
Categories of special needs students in the caseload	Students with learning disabilities	25	65.8
	Students with visual impairment and students with learning disabilities	6	15.8
	Students with hearing impairment and students with learning disabilities	4	10.5
	Students with hearing impairment	2	5.3
	Students with dyslexia	1	2.6

### **The Implementation of Counselling Service**

The counselling service comprises five activities, namely, “providing individual counselling”, “providing group counselling”, “providing career counselling”, “providing family counselling”, and “providing crisis counselling”. The results presented in Table 3 show that the counsellors implement all five counselling activities at the moderate level. The counsellors’ mean scores of the implementation range from 2.66 to 3.08 which indicate that 53.2% to 61.6% of the counsellors agree that they provide counselling activities for special needs students. The average mean score for the counselling service is 2.85 and this means that the counselling service is implemented by 57% of the school counsellors.

Table 3  
*The Implementation of the Counselling Service*

Counselling Activities	N	Mean	SD	Level of Implementation
Providing individual counselling	38	3.08	1.36	Moderate
Providing group counselling	38	2.87	1.32	Moderate
Providing career counselling	38	2.87	1.32	Moderate
Providing family counselling	38	2.78	1.23	Moderate
Providing crisis counselling	38	2.66	1.24	Moderate
Counselling Service		2.85	1.04	Moderate

Note. SD-standard deviation

### **The Implementation of the Guidance Service**

The guidance service comprises three activities. They are “providing group guidance activities”, “providing individual guidance activities” and “providing guidance class activities”. The results in Table 4 show that the counsellors implement all three (3) guidance activities at the moderate level. The counsellors’ mean scores on implementation range from 2.53 to 3.00 which mean that 50.6% to 60% of the counsellors agree that they do provide guidance activities for the special needs students. The average mean score for the guidance service is 2.77 and it shows that the guidance service is implemented by 55.4% of the school counsellors.

Table 4  
*The Implementation of the Guidance Service*

Guidance Activities	N	Mean	SD	Level of Implementation
Providing group guidance activities	38	3.00	1.43	Moderate
Providing individual guidance activities	38	2.79	1.38	Moderate
Providing guidance class activities	38	2.53	1.27	Moderate
Guidance Service		2.77	1.23	Moderate

Note. SD-standard deviation

### **Hindrances in Implementing the Guidance and Counselling Services**

The respondents were asked to select three major hindrances in implementing the services for special needs students. The three items counsellors considered as major hindrances were “the absence of a guideline on how to implement the services to special needs students” (23.7%), “the lack of skills to provide services to special needs students” (23.7%), and “the lack of knowledge about



special needs students” (18.4%). Other hindrances that hamper the services from being extended to the special needs students were “heavy workload with typical students” (10.5%); “no referral from special education teachers” (7.9%); “no specific instruction that guidance and counselling services should be provided for special needs students” (7.95); and “guidance and counselling services are provided by the special education teachers” (7.9%). Table 5 summarizes the finding on the hindrances in implementing the service for special needs students.

Table 5  
*Hindrances in Implementing the Service*

Hindrances	N	Frequency	%
There is no guideline on how to implement the services to special needs students	38	9	23.7
Lack of skills to provide the services to special needs students	38	9	23.7
Lack of knowledge about special needs students	38	7	18.4
Heavy workload with typical students	38	4	10.5
There is no referral from special education teachers	38	3	7.9
There is no specific instruction that guidance and counselling services should be provided for special needs students	38	3	7.9
Guidance and counselling service is provided by the special education teachers	38	3	7.9

## DISCUSSION

This study indicates that the guidance and counselling services are not widely extended by the school counsellors to special needs students. Slightly more than half of the school counsellors extend the counselling service (57%) and the guidance service (55.4%) to the special needs students. This shows that nearly another half of the counsellors do not extend these services to this type of students. It implies that nearly half of the special needs students in this study are deprived from receiving the guidance and counselling services. Yet, the counselling service is considered the core service in the school guidance and counselling services (KPM 1993; Suradi, 2000). This study has a similar finding to the studies carried out by Nichter and Edmonson (2005) and Pattison (2006) where the special needs students have limited access to the guidance and counselling services. The counsellors’ lack of training may explain the reason behind the limited access of the special needs students to such services. The majority of the school counsellors do not receive any training on counselling special needs students (92.1%) nor on knowledge of the special needs students (81.6%). Pattison’s (2006) study found that counsellors provide better access to guidance and counselling services when they have more knowledge about the special needs students. This may imply that without the training, the counsellors



may not have adequate knowledge on the students' characteristics and their needs for the services. The lack of knowledge and skills to work with the special needs students may cause them to feel unprepared to offer the services to special needs students as indicated by a previous study (Earhard & Umansky, 2005).

One of the major hindrances in implementing the counselling service and the guidance service to the special needs students found by this study is the absence of a guideline on the service implementation. The guideline provided by the Ministry of Education on the implementation of the school guidance and counselling services is a general guideline that mentions that the guidance and counselling services are for all students enrolled in the school. However, the existing guideline does not provide details on the roles and functions of school counsellors when dealing with the special needs students (KPM, 1993, 2009). A guideline on how to work with the special needs students and the description of the counsellors' roles when working with the special needs students is therefore needed. It may give the counsellors a clear idea of what is expected of them and help them on how to provide the services to the special needs students. This finding supports Baumberger and Harper's (2007) assertion that school counsellors who effectively include and provide the services to the special needs students are those who adhere to the principles of the American School Counselling Association's (ASCA) position statement on the school counsellors and special needs students. The American School Counselling Association (ASCA) delineated six roles of the school counsellors when working with special needs students in the position statement (ASCA, 2010). This position statement serves as a reference to school counsellors as it describes the counsellors' roles and the services expected to be delivered to the special needs students.

Lack of skills on how to provide the guidance and counselling services to the special needs students and lack of knowledge about the special needs students were perceived by the school counsellors as contributing to the limited guidance and counselling services being offered. This study reaffirms the importance of school counsellors' knowledge about the characteristics of the special needs students and the techniques to intervene with them (Nichter & Edmonson, 2005). The lack of training on the special needs students among the majority of school counsellors in this study explains the lack of competency perceived by them. Most of them do not receive in-service training on special needs students and counselling special needs students. This finding on the lack of training is consistent with the earlier findings that the school counsellors do not receive pre-service training from the counsellor preparatory institutions on services for special needs students (Azharizah & Salleh, 2011; Hanani, 2010).

The findings of this study are limited to the school counsellors and the schools involved and cannot be generalized to school counsellors in other schools who may have different ways of implementing the services. These findings are also limited to the questionnaire used which may not be comprehensive to cover all the activities to be carried out with special needs students.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, school counsellors need the knowledge on the special needs students and they need the skills to work with these students to enable them to provide inclusive guidance and counselling services. Training on special needs students and counselling special needs students should be provided for future counsellors and in-service school counsellors. It may be helpful if the future school counsellors and existing school counsellors are exposed to the basic characteristics of the different categories of special needs students and the basic skills required to handle them. The knowledge on the characteristics of the hearing impaired, the visually impaired and students with learning disabilities; the basic behavior management skills and communication skills for special needs students may enable counsellors to understand these students and their issues better and allow them to serve these students better as well. This may in turn give counsellors the confidence in providing greater access of the services to these students.

Guidelines on the implementation of the guidance and counselling services for the special needs students are needed by school counsellors. The counsellors may need to know the roles which are expected of them when working with special needs students. They may also need to know the counselling activities and the guidance activities which are appropriate for these students. The six roles of the school counsellors with regard to special needs students as delineated by the American School Counselling Association (ASCA) may serve as a basis for the guidelines. Descriptions on the various issues faced by the special needs students and suggestions on the possible counselling activities and guidance activities that can be provided maybe helpful for the counsellors.

## **CONCLUSION**

Both the counselling and guidance services for the special needs students are being implemented at the moderate level. The counsellors in the schools offering the special education integration program provide limited access to the guidance and counselling services to these students. The services need to be extended to all the special needs students as they are entitled to these services just like the typical students. To enable school counsellors to provide greater access to the services for the special needs students, the school counsellors need to be trained, equipped with the knowledge about special needs students and given the skills to intervene with these students. Guidelines on the implementation of the guidance and counselling services for the special needs students should also be made available to assist the school counsellors in including the special needs students in the school guidance and counselling services.

## REFERENCES

- American School Counsellor Association Delegate Assembly. (2003). *The role of professional school counsellor*. Retrieved (n.d.), from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.cfm?L1=1000&L2=69>
- American School Counselor Association. (2010). *The professional school counselor and students with special needs*. Retrieved (n.d.), from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>
- Azharizah, S., Sabariah, M., & Salleh, A. (2010). Kepentingan perkhidmatan bimbingan kerjaya kepada orang kurang upaya. In *Proceedings Seminar Kebangsaan Persatuan Kaunseling Malaysia*. Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. 13 – 15 Jun.
- Azharizah, S., & Salleh, A. (2011). Kesianaan dan keperluan latihan kepada kaunselor sekolah dalam program pendidikan khas. *Journal of Special Education*, 1(1), 129 – 141.
- Bahaman, A. S., & Turiman, S. (1999). *Statistics for social research with computer applications*. Kuala Lumpur: JJ Print & Copy.
- Chua, Y. P. (2005). *Kaedah penyelidikan buku 1*. Kuala Lumpur: Mc-Graw Hill.
- Erhard, R., & Umanksy, T. (2005). School counsellors' involvement in the process of inclusion in Israel. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 52(3), 175-194.
- Frye, H. N. (2005). How elementary school counsellors can meet the needs of students with disabilities. *Professional School Counselling*, 8(5), 442-450.
- Gay, L. R., & Airasian, P. (2003). *Educational research: competencies for analysis and applications* (7th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merril Prentice Hall.
- Hanani, H.R. (2005). Tinjauan perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling di sekolah rendah. In *Proceedings Seminar Pendidikan Maktab Perguruan Batu Lintang*, 15-16 September.
- Hanani, H. R., Hasnah, T., & Salleh, A. (2010). Perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling kepada pelajar berkeperluan khas: Isu keterpinggiran. In *Proceedings Seminar Kaunseling Silang Budaya*. 24 – 25 Mei.
- Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia. (1993). *Panduan pelaksanaan perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling di sekolah menengah*. Kuala Lumpur: Unit Bimbingan dan Kaunseling Bahagian Sekolah.
- Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia. (2008). *Maklumat pendidikan khas 2008*. Putrajaya: Bahagian Pendidikan Khas.
- Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia. (2009). *Panduan pelaksanaan perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling di sekolah menengah dan rendah*. Putrajaya: Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian.
- Norshidah, M. S., Aliza, A., & Zalizan, M. J. (2009). Sejarah Pendidikan Khas di Malaysia. In M. J. Zalizan (Ed.), *Pendidikan kanak-kanak berkeperluan khas: Konsep dan amalan* (hh. 1-14). Bangi: Fakulti Pendidikan, UKM.



- Manisah, M. A., Ramlee, M., & Zalizan, M. J. (2006). An empirical study on teachers' perception towards inclusive education in Malaysia. *International Journal of Special Education*, 21(3), 36-44.
- McEachern, A. G. (2003). School counsellor preparation to meet the guidance needs of exceptional students: A national study. *Counsellor Education & Supervision*, 42(4), 314.
- Milsom, A. S. (2002). Students with disabilities: School counselor involvement and preparation. *Professional School Counseling*, 5(5), 331-338.
- Nichter, M., & Edmonson, S. L. (2005). Counselling services for special education students. *Journal of Professional Counselling Practice Theory and Research*, 33(2), 50-62.
- Pattison, S. (2006). Beyond the classroom: The inclusion of young people with learning disabilities in UK mainstream counselling services. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(6), 547-564.
- Ramlee, M., Noraini, M. S., & Manisah, M. A. (2004). Beyond didactics: The need for legislature to upgrade vocational special needs education and training in Malaysia. In *Prosiding Pendidikan Khas 2004*, pp. 130-135.
- Salwa, M. (2004). *Perkhidmatan kaunseling di sekolah-sekolah menengah di Brunei Darussalam*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.
- Shapiee @ Shafie, L. (2002). *Program pendidikan khas di Sarawak*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.
- Suradi Salim. (1993). Pelaksanaan perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling di sekolah-sekolah di Malaysia. *Siri Monograf Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Malaya*, 1.
- Suradi Salim. (2000). Tahap pelaksanaan perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling di sekolah-sekolah menengah di Malaysia. In Abd. Halim Othman (Ed.) *Kaunseling dalam pendidikan menengah* (pp. 39-71). Kota Kinabalu: Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
- Trenhaile, J. (2007). Foreword. In J. P. Baumberger & R. E. Harper, *Assisting students with disabilities: A handbook for school counsellors* (2nd ed., pp.vii-viii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Zalizan, M. J. (2009). *Pendidikan inklusif dan pelajar berkeperluan khas*. Professor inaugural lecture. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.