

# **Effectiveness of Structured Learning Approach to Improve Counselor Competence in Applying Solutions-Focused Counseling**

**M. Ramli**

Department of Guidance and Counseling  
State University of Malang, Indonesia  
m.ramli.fip@um.ac.id

**Nur Hidayah**

Department of Guidance and Counseling  
State University of Malang, Indonesia  
nur.hidayah.fip@um.ac.id

**Lutfi Fauzan**

Department of Guidance and Counseling  
State University of Malang, Indonesia  
lutfi.fauzan.fip@um.ac.id

**Abstract:** This study aims to determine the effectiveness of a structured learning approach in improving competence for solution-focused counseling of laboratory junior and senior high School counselors of Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). To achieve this goal, research was carried out through the experimental one group pretest-posttest design. The research subjects consisted of laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM. Solution-focused counseling knowledge data were collected by tests, while solution-focused counseling skills data were collected by a rating scale. Data were analyzed by nonparametric analysis techniques of Wilcoxon. The results of the study show that a structured learning approach is effective to improve counselors' competence in a solution-focused counseling service to help students achieve meaningful goals in their lives.

**Keywords:** structured learning approach, solution-focused counseling, school counselors

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The complexity of 21st century life affects the complexity of the problems faced by middle and high school students so that the challenges faced by junior and senior high school counselors are increasingly complex today. In Indonesian schools, the complexity of the 21st century and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has resulted in increasing complexity in the implementation of counseling services in schools. Even though the number of counselors is limited, the service time for students is also limited, and the number of students who are assisted is very large so that the service of counseling in schools is under-threatened. In addition, counseling services in schools are dominated by models that emphasize the discussion of problems and their causes so that they use more service time. To that end, counseling services require a model that is more relevant to current conditions, namely an efficient and effective counseling model in helping counselees deal with changes and problems that are so complex and rapidly changing so that they can develop themselves optimally.

One such counseling model is a solution-focused counseling. The counseling model is important to be applied and developed in junior and senior high schools because of several studies, the model is efficient and effective in helping counselees achieve the expected changes with an average of three meetings (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007) and 25% of counselees only need one meeting (Macdonald, 2007). The solution-focused counseling model comes from the Solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) which is one of the most important postmodern counseling models (Corey, 2013).

The solution-focused counseling model is much needed in the era of counselees and institutions providing psychological assistance demanding short

and effective counseling services. Similarly, solution-focused counseling skills are needed by counselors who work in the setting of assistance that is expected to provide more services in a shorter time (Gladding, 2009). The counseling model is becoming increasingly popular in counseling services because of its practicality, efficiency, and effectiveness in assisting counselees (Sciarrà, 2004). In addition, now, SFBC is a counseling model that is most widely used by practitioners of helping professions (Sperry, 2010). SFBC is effective in assisting families, couples, individuals, children and adolescents with a variety of life problems (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Mulawarman, 2010; Ummah, 2012; Wiyono, 2013; Sklare, 2014; Ramli & Hidayah, 2015; Eryanti, 2015; Arofah, 2015).

The description above shows the need to improve counseling competency focusing on solutions as a model of counseling services in junior and senior high schools. For that, laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM as the persons in charge of counseling services are required to improve counseling competence focusing on solutions for improving the quality of counseling services at laboratory junior and senior high Schools of UM. However, the implementation has not been adequate due to inadequate counselor mastery in a solution-focused counseling service. This was revealed from the results of the interview with the counseling coordinator of the laboratory junior and senior high schools of UM (December, 2016).

Based on the description above, laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM need to get assistance in improving their competence in the implementation of solutions-focused counseling for counselee assistance in solving their problems. For this reason, improving the counselor's competence in the application of solution-focused counseling needs

to be held so that they can improve the quality of counseling services. Thus the counseling service is expected to improve its quality so that laboratory junior and senior high school students of UM are more enthusiastic in involving themselves in counseling services so that they develop optimally as excellent human resources for the triumph of the nation and Indonesian country.

Based on the description above, the problems faced by laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM is that inadequate mastery of their knowledge and skills in a solution-focused counseling service. Knowledge and skills that have not been mastered by them are (1) the nature, procedures, and techniques of solution-focused counseling, and (2) the application of solution-focused counseling to achieve the expected goals. In connection with these problems, it is necessary to have training in structured learning approaches for improving the competence of laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM to implement solutions-focused counseling to help counselees achieve the expected goals so that the implementation of laboratory junior and senior high school counseling services of UM is optimal for improving the quality of excellent human resources.

Structured learning approach is a training model based on behavioral psychology that emphasizes mastery of step-by-step skills from developing good relationships, modeling, role playing, feedback, and transfer of learning skills into real life (Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Goldstein, 1993). For that reason, the solution-focused counseling enhancement training procedure is carried out through good steps: relationship building, modeling, role playing, giving feedback, and transferring learning skills into real life.

Some research shows that structured learning approaches effectively improve individual ability. Among them, Latifah (2015) found that this approach was effective in increasing students' self-adjustment in industrial work practices. In addition, Ardiyanti, Hitipeuw, & Ramli (2017) found that this approach was effective in improving sharing skills of at risk students. Similarly, Ramli, Utoyo, and Irtadji (2007) found that this approach effectively improved the emotional intelligence of vocational high school students. Considering that the structured learning approach is effective in improving students' ability, it is strongly assumed that this approach is also effective for improving solution-focused counseling skills for laboratory junior and senior school counselors of UM. Therefore, it is important to examine the effectiveness of structured learning approach for improving the competence of laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM in providing solution-focused counseling services.

## **II. METHODS**

Problems faced by laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM are related to inadequate knowledge and skills of: (1) the nature, procedures, and techniques of solution-focused counseling, and (2) the application of counseling-focused counseling to achieve the expected goals.

These problems are solved by structured learning approach based training on solution-focused counseling competency.

To overcome these problems, research was carried out with an experimental design of one group pretest and posttest design. The research subjects consisted of 7 laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM. Data collection techniques used is tests and rating scales. The test is used to collect data of solution-focused counseling knowledge, while the rating scale is used to collect data of the skills for application of solution-focused counseling. The collected data were analyzed by nonparametric technique of Wilcoxon to determine the effectiveness of the structured learning approach to improve the competence of laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM in solution-focused counseling services.

The training based on structured learning approach to improve the competence of solution-focused counseling was carried out in five meetings and its data were collected twice before and after the training. The first meeting was carried out by modeling solution-focused counseling through video counseling media. The second meeting was performing role playing, feedback, and assignment. The third meeting was the practice of solution-focused counseling to solve personal and social problems. The fourth meeting was the practice of solution-focused counseling to solve learning and career problems. The fifth meeting was an evaluation of the implementation of solution-focused counseling training.

## **III. RESULTS**

Based on data analysis, the results of the training based on a structured learning approach to improve solution-focused counseling competence for laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM as follows:

### **A. Knowledge Acquisition**

Participants' knowledge of the nature, procedures, and techniques techniques of solution-focused counseling is on an average score of 35 from a range of 5 to 100 before training (pretest) and is on an average score of 85 after training (posttest). Thus the increase in the acquisition score (gain score) of participants' knowledge is 50. The analysis results of Wilcoxon showed the value of  $z = -2.375$  with a significance of  $0.018 < 0.05$ . This means that knowledge of the nature, procedures, and techniques of solution-focused counseling obtained by participants after structured learning approach based training increased significantly compared to knowledge before taking part in the training.

### **B. Skill acquisition**

Participants' skills in applying procedures and techniques of solution-focused counseling to help counselees overcome their problems are on an average score of 1.57 from a range of 1 to 10 before training (pretest) and on average score of 7.71 after training (posttest). Thus the increase in the gain score of the participants' skills is 6.14. The analysis result of

Wilcoxon showed the value of  $z = -2.366$  with a significance of  $0.018 < 0.05$ . This means that the skills in implementing procedures and techniques of solutions-focused counseling obtained by participants after structured learning approach based training increased significantly compared to skills before participating in the training.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The training with structured learning approaches to increase knowledge and skills of solution-focused counseling shows significant results in increasing the knowledge and skills of participants in the application of solutions-focused counseling. These significant results occur because participants are able to follow the stages of a structured learning approach as applied in training, namely the establishment of good relationships, modeling, role playing, feedback, and transfer of learning skills into real life (Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Goldstein, 1993). Through these stages, participants gain knowledge and skills to apply solution-focused counseling to help students achieve their expected goals.

The training to improve the solution-focused counseling competence was well implemented in achieving its objectives because it was based on facilitative relationships between training participants and between participants and facilitators. Such relationships can be realized, among others, by introducing the facilitators to the training participants, expressing pleasant experiences that can enhance the self-esteem of each trainee, delivering training objectives, explaining the importance of training, and giving examples of training activities in counseling services in junior and senior high schools both through direct examples and video counseling. These activities can motivate the trainees to follow the next steps enthusiastically.

Modeling is the process of providing training by giving models (examples) of trained skills (Uke, Ramli, & Triyono, 2017). The purpose of modeling is helping the trainees to be able to apply the skills exemplified by the facilitators /videos according to their objectives. In this case the facilitators provide examples of skills included in solution-focused counseling procedures and techniques. In addition, the facilitators ask the trainees to function as a model of skills that will be trained by the other trainees.

During modeling, the trainees pay attention to the model showing the modeled skills. After that, they practice by applying skills that are modeled in situations that resemble real situations through role playing. Role plays the skills that are expected to be mastered by the trainee's takes place repeatedly in the training sessions. The role playing is carried out by the training participants in groups consisting of two people or more depending on the trained skills.

When trainees practice developing skills of procedures and techniques of solution-focused counseling, the facilitators pay attention to and give feedback on how far the training participants have role played related to the trained skills. The feedback is in the form of reinforcement of the trained behaviors,

improvement suggestions to improve the trained skills, and retraining the trained skills. After the trainees practice their skills and get feedback from the facilitators, the trainees are ready to apply their learning outcomes in the real situation of counseling services in junior and senior high schools. For this reason, the facilitators provide tasks intended to improve the skills that are trained and nurtured so that what they have learned in the training setting can be applied in counseling services to counsees both in laboratory junior and senior high schools of UM.

Those five steps are the main steps used by the facilitators to help the training participants improve their counseling competencies to apply solution-focused counseling. In its implementation, training with a structured learning approach is cycled until the training participants master the skills trained in both procedures and techniques of solution-focused counseling. This shows that the counseling model shown by the facilitators helps participants train themselves through active role playing. In the exercise, participants get information about their feasibility through feedback provided by the facilitators. Finally, participants can continue to improve the skills they have mastered by practicing outside training meetings as homework so that the abilities learned in training meetings are reinforced by the homework assigned to them. Thus, a structured training approach is comprehensive in helping participants improve their knowledge and skills of solution-focused counseling.

The success of a structured learning approach in enhancing knowledge and skills of solution-focused counseling supports the effectiveness of modeling, role playing, feedback, and transfer of learning in enhancing individual abilities (Sprafkin, Gershaw, and Goldstein, 1993). Likewise, the results of this study support the research results of: (1) Ramli, Utoyo, & Irtadji about the effectiveness of the approach for improving emotional intelligence of vocational students; (2) Latifah (2015) about the effectiveness of the approach in increasing student self-adjustment of work practice participants; and (3) Ardiyanti, Hitipeuw, and Ramli (2017) about the effectiveness of this approach to improve the skills of various students with learning difficulties.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Based on data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that a structured learning approach is effective in improving the competence of solutions-focused counseling for laboratory junior and senior high school counselors of UM. Thus, training activities with a structured learning approach succeeded in achieving the expected goals of increasing mastery of the training participants in the application of solution-focused counseling to help counsees achieve the expected goals in finding solutions to overcome problems faced by laboratory junior and senior high school students of UM.

In detail, there are: (1) an increase in the average score of participants' knowledge acquisition of 50 from the score range 5 to 100. The increase is

significant in terms of obtaining knowledge about the nature, procedures, and techniques of solution-focused counseling; and (2) increasing the average score of participants' skills acquisition by 6.14 from the score range 1 to 10. The increase was significant in terms of obtaining the skills in implementing procedures and techniques of solution-focused counseling to help counselees overcome problems faced like personal problems, learning, social, or career.

To improve the success of the implementation of solution-focused counseling training based on structured learning approaches, the following suggestions should be put forward: (1) the acquisition of participants' knowledge and skills about solution-focused counseling needs to be improved through real practice in helping counselees overcome problems; (2) the similar training needs to be given to counselors in other schools so that the implementation of counseling services is more in line with real needs in schools; (3) the practice of solution-focused counseling should use actual counselees in order to be more authentic; and (4) further research is needed with a pure experimental research with a broader and more diverse population of research to produce broader generalizations.

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