

# Character Education via Guidance and Counseling Service During Covid-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

Educating student characters through guidance and counseling during the Covid-19 outbreak has been great attention to school counselors. This study aims to explore the focus of school counselors in providing character education via guidance and counseling services to students during learning from home as impact of corona viruses pandemic. 91 junior high and high school counselors participated as respondents in this descriptive study. School counselors completed questionnaire containing demographic information and focus of character education services before and during the pandemic. The results showed that most of the school counselors still supported on the importance of character education through guidance and counseling services and made it part of their program. Student characters that has become the focus of school counselors before and during the Covid-19 pandemic remained the same but there were slight differences in the priority.

**Keywords:** Student character, Guidance and counseling service, Covid-19 pandemic, School counselor.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a deliberate educational effort intended to help students of having certain character qualities for shaping their personality. On a wider scale, [1] identified target of character education which was addressed to build a foundation for lifelong learning, support human relationships, and develop values and virtues needed to live together in the global era. the goal of character education was students had the attitudes, values, skills, and motivation needed to be moral individuals and become members of society who contributed to a democratic and plural society [2]. Furthermore, Kemdikbud mentioned the main values that must be the focus of character education, namely religious, nationalist, independent, mutual cooperation, and integrity [3]. Each of them had sub-values.

Guidance and counseling service as part of the education system in Indonesia has a significant role in supporting character education [3]. Along with subject teachers, school counselors are school personals who provide such education. The views of Blum and Davis [4] should be considered by school counselors in formulating school philosophies and visions and missions that support the character development of

students, implementing guidance curricula that advance positive character development, and using proactive counseling methods in an effort to strengthen student characters. Looking upon character education in school settings can be carried out through classroom-based activity and school culture, guidance and counseling have a special place in character education because its services are very comprehensive.

School activities since March 2020 has been disrupted by the Covid-19 outbreak. The transmission of this coronavirus has been grown rapidly, so the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture issued a Decree Number 15 of 2020 which decided to temporarily suspended learning activities in schools starting from early childhood education to university level until an undetermined time. Student learning activities are carried out from home using a distance learning system (learning from home). In responding such policy, it is obvious that many teachers do not have proper experiences in applying learning from home models. In addition, the inadequacy of online learning infrastructure both on teacher and students' side have lessened learning activities. One of the impacts is on character education through guidance and counseling

service since the school counselors also should give the service from home.

The continuity of character education should not end although the Covid-19 outbreak has been hindered it. Disruption of character education should be challenged for number of reasons. Berkowitz and Bier [5] stated that character education had a positive relationship with academic motivation and aspirations, learning achievement, prosocial behavior, love for school, prosocial and democratic values, conflict resolution skills, self-control, self-esteem, and trust and respect for teachers. The results of the previously research indicated a significant relationship between character education and academic achievement [6]. Meanwhile, Dodds[7] found that character education leads to a decreasing student emotion. The research findings showed clearly that character education must be carried out in a sustainable manner using the most suitable learning platform, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a normal situation when learning was done regularly in schools, character education model initiated by Ki Hajar Dewantara *ingngarso sung tolodo, ingmadyomangunkarso, and tut wurihandayani* worked well. Today learning from home initiative using a distance learning approach affects the role of guidance and counseling services in doing character education. Learning from home atmosphere which correlates with the absence of face to face interaction has impact on character education through guidance and counseling services. For character education, learning from home initiative has some weaknesses such as lack of direct interaction, lack of behavior modeling from teacher, and low emotional relationship. Judging such weaknesses along with the threatening of Covid-19 spreading, school counselors ideally should focus on services that are relevant to student needs to cope with the impact of corona viruses through existing online learning platforms, such as video conferencing (Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, or Webex) or asynchronous learning activities at home.

No one know exactly when Covid-19 outbreak will end. In order to cope with the impact of pandemic physically and psychologically, students must be equipped with some strong characters. School counselors ideally have to focus their services on characters assumed very urgent for their students. By strengthening such characters, students will develop self-confidence. In turn, it will produce positive behaviour and decrease stress or anxiety when deal with Covid-19 issues. This study aims to describe character education through guidance and counseling services conducted by school counselors before and during the Covid-19 pandemic in junior and senior high schools particularly student characters that has become their attention.

## 2. METHOD

In order to describe character education conducted by school counselor through guidance and counseling service during the Covid-19 pandemic, this study used descriptive design. Through this design, data were described and analyzed descriptively. 91 school counselors (30 male and 61 female) participated as respondents indicated their filling a questionnaire voluntarily via Google Form. The school counselors' ages were 22-58 years, the mean school counselor age are 40 years (SD = 12.1) with a service period of 1-38 years, the mean was 11.8 years (SD = 9.69). The educational background of the respondents consisted of 75 undergraduate and 16 masters in guidance and counseling or psychology. Of the 91 school counselors, 20 were work in middle schools, 53 were in high schools, and 18 are in vocational schools. Respondents were recruited using a convenience sampling procedure through the use of professional organization networking (Indonesian Guidance and Counseling Association).

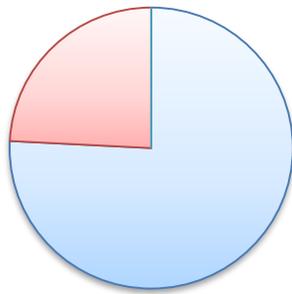
A two-part questionnaire was developed to collect data. The first part was designed to collect demographic data of respondents, such name, educational level, experience as school counselor. The second part contained 10 items, the first two asking the school counselor's perceptions of the importance of character education through guidance and counseling using a Likert scale response (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). The second four items were questions with responses in the checkbox where the respondents could add more choices. In addition to each of the second four items, respondents have to write the reasons related to the selection in the checkbox. The draft of questionnaire formatted into a Google Form was validated by two colleague expertise in the guidance and counseling. The review results indicated that no significant revisions needed to be made. The ten items met the construct validity requirements and could be administered to the respondents. The questionnaire was then administered to respondents via Google Form by sending its link. Data analysis was carried out descriptively by looking at trend data and qualitative response categorization.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to describe character education through guidance and counseling services in junior and senior high schools in term of student characters that have become school counselor main focus. Collected data through a survey show that this goal could be achieved and the data were described into following themes, namely school counselor's perception of character education, important student characters strengthened before the Covid-19 pandemic, student characters strengthened through guidance and

counseling services during the Covid-19 pandemic, character that was successfully strengthened through guidance and counseling services during the Covid-19 pandemic, and character that was difficult to do through guidance and counseling services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1 illustrated the perceptions of school counselors regarding character strengthening through guidance and counseling services. Figure 2 showed the focus of character development through guidance and counseling services before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, the figure also presented characters that were considered successfully strengthened and difficult to develop during a pandemic. Figure 3 presented the factors supporting the success of strengthening character during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Figure 4 informs the inhibiting factors for character development during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Strongly agree Agree  
No opinion Not Agree  
Strongly not agree

Figure 1. School counselor perception to character education via their service.

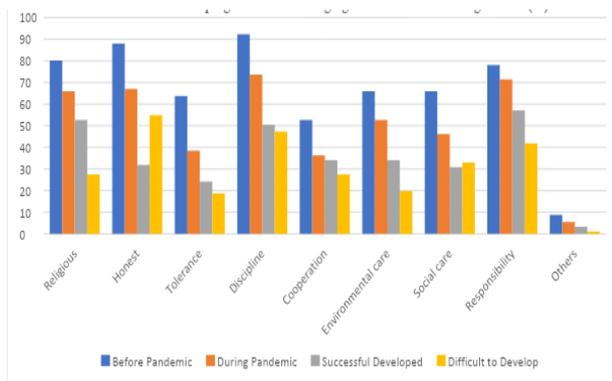


Figure 2 Focus of developing characters through guidance and counseling services.

The research results presented in figure 1 show that respondents have relatively similar perception of guidance and counseling service roles in educating student characters. The majority of school counselors (24.2% agree and 75.8% strongly agree) support character education as part of the guidance and counseling program in their schools. Furthermore, in

daily practice, 95.7% of them has provided character education through guidance and counseling services. Only a few (4.3%) have not programmed it yet.

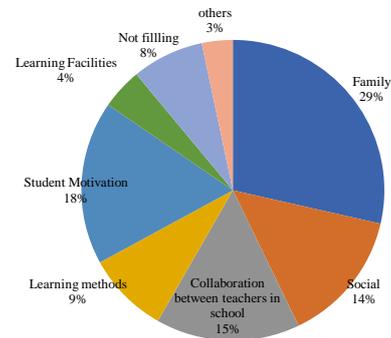


Figure 3. Supporting factors of character education success.

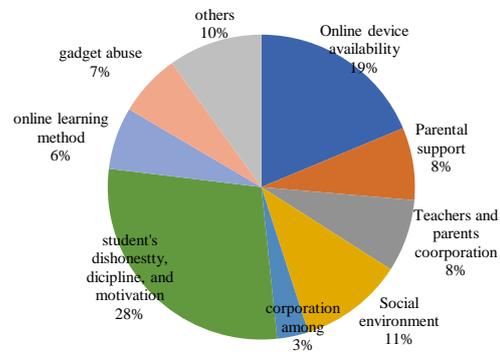


Figure 4. Inhibiting factors of character education during the Covid-19 pandemic

Figure 2 inform student characters that has been the main focus of school counselors before and during Covid-19 outbreak. In addition, the Figure also provide student characters that according school counselors are successful and difficult to develop. They identify eight student characters that have been their main focus. Consecutively they are discipline, honest religious, responsible, caring for environment, caring socially, and tolerant. School counselors mention several reasons for these necessities, among others are (1) the characters are requested by vision and mission of their schools, (2) the characters are useful for students as basic assets to be an independent individual and for social live, and (3) as the students' modality in adapting to global changes and career development. Meanwhile other characters are not under significant emphasis.

According to school counselor perception, among eight characters that has become their attention during the Covid-19 pandemic, responsible, religious, and discipline are characters that were successfully developed through guidance and counseling services. At the same time, some counselors identify honesty, discipline, and responsibility as characters that are difficult to develop. The character of responsibility on the one hand was successfully developed, while on the

other hand, some counselors were difficult to develop. In term of student characters that should be strong enough during pandemic period, all three character are exactly needed to deal with the impact of the pandemic which requires a paradigm shift in the behavior of students.

School counselors identify several factors that support character strengthening through guidance and counseling during the Covid-19 pandemic. Family environment, motivation, the collaboration of school personnel in designing courage-based learning, and the environment of students are identified as supporting factors. Against underdeveloped characters, school counselors recognized discipline, responsibility, and motivation as factors that contribute to the unsustainable development of other characters. The next factor is facilities and infrastructure for online learning such as limited gadgets, networks, and lack of skills required in online learning.

Current data indicate that school counselors have fairly uniform perception in identifying various student characters that have been their focus both before and during the Covid-19 outbreak. It means that they do not determine the pandemic issues as a specific situation that needs different treatment for developing student character. In other words, they ideally should be able to identify precisely which characters their students must have in order to cope with the pandemic issues. If we look further at school counselors' perception, the determination of the focus has not been based on the results of the student need analysis. At this position, student character education through guidance and counseling is still not on the right track, as supported from several previous studies. For example, the findings of Nurhasah and Nida [8] confirm the findings of recent study, namely that character education by school counselors have not been designed according to the needs of students. The selection of characters to be included in their service is merely based on their assumption what are important for students. Such assumption may not fit to the real needs of students. Research of Parker, Nelson, and Burns [9] confirms the importance of character education programs in schools. The success of character education will be determined firstly by its strict implementation and secondly by how precise scientific foundation chosen for its implementation. Scientific foundation can be interpreted that character education should base on what character should be promoted according to student need assessment and what delivery system assumed effective in certain students, school counselors, and school atmosphere.

In the current research, all of the selected character that becomes school counselor focus are determined important both before and during pandemic situation. Many governments have implemented measures that

limit the number of people gathering in public places. These actions have disrupted the normal functioning of the school. To anticipate such disturbances, UNICEF [10], for example, issued new items on how to deal with Covid-19, namely physical distance, health practices, and hand hygiene, the anticipation of illness. Maintaining physical distancing, hand filling, and wearing masks for the majority of students are behaviors that are less comfortable and create limitations for their daily life. For this inconvenience or unfamiliarity, students will ignore the implementation of health protocols in the midst of a pandemic so that they are prone to exposure to the corona virus. A report of UNESCO [10] revealed that spreading Covid-19 cases among children under 18 years are high. This example wants to remind school counselors that the discipline is very important character that should be strengthened to their students during pandemic. Casali, Franco, Ghisi, and Meneghetti's [11] research conducted in Italy, one of the countries with the most Covid-19 cases, shows some characters that have a positive effect on psychological distress and self-efficacy in some samples that are at least 18 years old. The fundamental roles for transcendence emerge from their analysis. Transcendence --- a sense of purpose outside of oneself, orientation towards others (love), meaning (spirituality), positivity (hope, gratitude, enthusiasm), or self-sacrifice (perseverance, self-regulation) --- was identified to ensure better mental health (with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression) and higher self-efficacy regarding how best to approach situations caused by the pandemic. This finding can be an illustration for school counselors in making decision of important characters to develop for their students.

The success of guidance and counseling services for supporting character education a part from being related to the certain selected characters is also connected to the delivery system. The delivery system also relates to school counselor competencies pursued in higher education and professional development in the related fields. School counselors are thus in the best position to provide character education because they are familiar with issues related to mental development and health [12]. Having such competencies in character education will enable school counselors to provide effective service to their students. As determined by the Ministry of Education and Culture [3], delivery system of character education can be carried out through classroom-based activities and school culture. Teachers and school counselors can focus the same characters but different approaches in strengthen student characters. On the other side, school culture can promote the ownership of student to characters. In essence, school culture is habituation. It is one of the best methods to cultivate characters. A synergy between formal and habituation will lead to successful student character development. Guidance and counseling through basic

services, responsiveness, and individual planning can strengthen student characters comprehensively. Basic service is addressed to all students so that they have opportunity in developing necessary characters. Responsive service is intended to help students who experience difficulties to develop particular character. Meanwhile through individual planning school counselors help students to plan what priority character they want to have and develop. The results of Barus' research [13] showed that character education through guidance and counseling services has a positive effect compared to character education that is integrated into subject learning. This finding can be understood in term of the comprehensiveness of guidance and counseling service as mentioned above. Students have opportunity to develop their characters through vary avenues.

The results of the study can reveal the phenomenon of character education during the Covid-19 pandemic that has not been running normally. This study has some limitations that need attention for further research First, information about character education is still limited to the school counselor's side, according to their perception. Information from students has not been obtained at all. Main obstacle of collecting data in pandemic time is important issues. School counselors tend to avoid direct interview since it will have high risk of spreading corona viruses so that the data obtained are not in depth. For such limitation, further research may involve more samples, use qualitative approach, and involves students as respondents as a method of triangulating data.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

School counselors as guidance and counseling agents have important role in promoting character education in school settings particularly in period of Covid-19 outbreak. It is important to them to focus on educating characters needed by students in dealing with pandemic issues. Although school counselors have agreed upon the important of promoting character education through guidance and counseling service, their character priority to strengthen before and during Covid-19 outbreak is quite similar. Selected student characters to promote are based on school counselor assumption of what are the best for students. They are not based on student need assessment. In turn, school counselors have some difficulties to measure the success of their services. Educating character to students is not an easy task during the pandemic time, since there are many obstacles experiencing by school counselor and students as well. Unsupportive family environment, low motivation to learn from home among students, lack of online devices, unprepared school counselors to provide online services, and teachers and school counselor collaboration are factors that hinder the character education in school settings.

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