

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has recorded an impressive growth rate for a nation so young. Fast developing into a fully developed nation, the country has undergone tremendous physical as well as economic transformations. As with the country's progress and development, her people too have undergone great socio-cultural transformations. Malaysian society today, needs to cope with the hectic demands and competitiveness of modern society. Stress-related disorders have been on the rise. Such social developments must be checked and counter-balanced to maintain a healthy society – not only physically but also mentally. This has created a demand for more professionals counselling services. This in turn means that more and more counselling personnel need to be trained in order to fulfil the increasing demand for counselling services. Such developments have become an impetus to the development of the counselling service in the private sectors such as corporate firms, non-governmental organizations, rehabilitation centers and learning institutions such as colleges (Abdul Halim Othman, 1996).

With increased awareness and understanding of the importance of counselling, clients expect better services and results. Counsellors need to be sensitive to the current socio-economic environments as well as the latest trends and methods employed in the counselling industry. Hence, counsellor competence is highly crucial in providing a therapeutic outcome. The maintenance of better counselling services can only be sustained through a rigorous preparation programme that provides a strong foundation for

counsellor trainees (Othman, 1994). Standard counsellor trainees' training programmes usually include a practicum component. Counselling skills and knowledge are required in the preparation of counsellors to-be.

Many studies have since been conducted with the objective to improve the development of the counselling profession and produce better counsellors. A variety of variables that may potentially affect the acquisition and performance of counselling skills in counselor trainees has been examined. However, most studies in these areas examined a variety of variables as the primary factor affecting the development of the helping profession (Boyd & Walter, 1975; Miars et al., 1983; Bowman et al., 1979). These studies on variables focused on the process of developing interpersonal skills among counsellors (Thompson, 1986), competence and identity as therapist (Blocher, 1983; Fleming, 1953; Loganbill et al., 1982), sex role orientation (Bem, 1974; Bem et al., 1976; Fong and Borders, 1985), or supervision relationship (Tracey et al., 1989). However, there are only been limited studies on the role of counselling self-efficacy as a potential variable in determining counselling skill performance and counsellor trainee development.

To-date, research studies on self-efficacy have been generally conducted on altering coping behaviours of clients, for example in 'handling snakes, (Bandura & Adams, 1977), cutting down smoking (Colleti et al., 1985), and overcoming spider phobias (Bandura et al., 1985). Further self-efficacy studies have dealt with the therapeutic situation, with focus on client rather than counselor: Moe & Zeiss (1982) studied self-efficacy for social skills, Lee (1983) studied self-efficacy in assertiveness training and Barrios's (1983) self-efficacy looked at heterosocial anxiety in clients.

Hence, it appears that research on perceived self-efficacy among counselors in training has been limited. It would be beneficial to examine counsellors' self-efficacy and judgements on how well they can execute counseling behaviours and skills required to produce a therapeutic outcome. It is thus worthwhile for education policy makers, curriculum planners and counsellor trainers to consider how self-efficacy mechanism may have a strong influence on a trainee's performance of counselling skills. It would be valuable to know the different perceptions of counselling self-efficacy across different levels of training by examining the effects of Practicum 1 training and Techniques in Counselling course on counselling self-efficacy among counsellor trainees.

1.1 Theoretical Background

The construct of self-efficacy has a relatively brief history – it began with Bandura's (1977) publication of "Self-Efficacy: Towards a Unifying Theory of Behavioural Change." The concept of self-efficacy has since been widely studied and used in varied disciplines and settings (see Bandura, 1982, 1986; Maddux & Stanley, 1986; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991).

In brief, as originally proposed by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is a set of situational specific beliefs held by individuals about their ability to successfully perform a given task or behaviours so as to bring about specific outcomes. The self-efficacy theory stresses on the role of cognitive factors in mediating behaviours especially in terms of what people know how to do and what people actually do. It is an extension and refinement of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

In simpler terms, the self-efficacy theory states that people will attempt behaviours that they believe that they can perform and will resist behaviours, which they believe they cannot perform. It has also been demonstrated that individuals will attempt previously untried behaviour, which they believe they are capable of performing more readily than they will attempt on behaviours, which they believe they are incapable of performing. Bandura (1986) advanced the notion that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs enable them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviours in several ways. Efficacy beliefs help determine initiation of a behaviour, how much effort people will expend on an activity, persistence in face of obstacles and emotional reaction during actual and anticipated situation. These beliefs in personal capabilities concerned not with the skills one has but with judgment of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses (Bandura, 1986). In short, self-efficacy is a belief that one 'has what it takes' to successfully perform a behaviour in a task-specific and situation-specific context. Bandura presented the construct not as an enduring personality trait but rather as a set of cognitive performance appraisals attached to specific behaviours. Therefore, one's percepts of self-efficacy vary greatly according to specific behaviours with which they are associated. Nevertheless, high self-efficacy does not ensure an individual will perform better. If the individual lacks of skills, he or she may not be able to attain the expected level of performance and may give up. However, the more self-efficacy, the more likely an individual will engage in the behaviour to produce the expected result and in turn will increase sense of efficacy, for human behaviours have reciprocal effects. For instance, teachers with high efficacy in their teaching abilities but with dismal pedagogical skills may persist even in face of failure, whereas highly

competent teachers with an unfortunate case of low self-efficacy may perceive things are tougher than they really are and may give up all together. Here again, it is this perceived self-efficacy that helps explain why people's behaviour differs widely even when they have similar knowledge and skills. Thus, in line with this assumption, the best predictor of behaviour is believed to be the self-efficacy percepts on an individual with an adequate skill level. To exhibit "competent functioning", it requires accuracy of perception and harmony between self-efficacy beliefs on one hand and possessed skills and knowledge on the other.

In addition to postulating the mechanism by which behaviour change occurs, Bandura (1977) specified that a sense of competence can be acquired, maintained and altered via four (4) sources. Bandura wrote that **mastery experience**, that is actual experiences of successfully performing the behaviours in question is the most influential source and that, simply put, success raises self-efficacy and failure lowers it. However, once experience and success has created a strong sense of efficacy in an individual, failure is unlikely to affect it.

Another source of efficacy is **vicarious experience** or **modeling**. If other people can do it, so can I. This form of experience is weaker than mastery experience, but when people are uncertain about their own ability or when they have limited prior experience, they become more sensitive to it. Seeing other similar people perform successfully can raise self-percepts of efficacy in observers that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities (Bandura et al., 1979). Social comparison of performance through modeling is part of individuals daily performance evaluation.

Verbal persuasion can also boost self-efficacy that lead people to try hard enough to succeed. Social persuasions or words of encouragement have been widely used to get people to believe they possess the capabilities that will enable them to achieve what they seek. However, Bandura (1986) suggested that it is easier to undermine efficacy beliefs by means of verbal persuasion than to enhance or create them. Similarly, raising unrealistic beliefs of personal competence only invites failure and will further undermine the recipient's perceived self-efficacy.

People too rely partly on information from their **physiological state** such as stress, arousal, fear, anxiety, fatigue and pains to provide judgment on their capabilities. They read their visceral arousal in stressful and taxing situations as a sign of vulnerability to perform certain tasks. Certain treatment to eliminate fear, anxiety or stress has heightened perceived self-efficacy with corresponding improvement in performance (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

Exposure to sources of information that is relevant for judging personal capabilities however, does not ensure ones self-efficacy perception will be altered. The cognitive processing of efficacy information plays a role to mediate the type of information people attend to and use in forming their self-efficacy perceptions, and the rules or heuristic they use to weigh and blend such information into final judgments. For example, "A host of factors including personal, social, situational, and temporal circumstances under which events occur, affect how personal experiences are cognitively appraised. For this reason, even noteworthy performance attainments do not necessarily boost perceived self-efficacy" (Bandura, 1986, p.401). Bandura too noted that self-efficacy beliefs differ from *outcome expectations*, "judgments of the likely consequence

that behaviour will produce” (p.391). Outcome expectations are related to efficacy beliefs precisely because these beliefs in part determine the expectations. Individuals who expect success in a particular enterprise anticipate successful outcomes. For instance, students who are confident in their academic abilities will expect high marks on related exams and authors who are confident in their writing skills will expect good response from publishers. Thus, Bandura pointed that efficacy, by virtue of its mediator role, is a stronger predictor of behaviours than either outcome expectations or knowledge and skills, but the relationship among the three components is complex.

In the areas of self-referent thoughts in the social cognitive theory, the role of self-efficacy has been a potential contribution in expectancy belief to understanding self-regulatory strategies, motivation and achievement striving. Therefore, Bandura (1986) pointed that self-efficacy beliefs differ from other expectancy beliefs. These beliefs have in common in that they are beliefs about one’s perceived capabilities; they differ in that self-efficacy is defined in terms of individuals’ perceived capabilities to attain designated types of performances and achieve specific results. Self-efficacy beliefs are sensitive to contextual factors. As such, they differ from other expectancy beliefs in that self-efficacy judgments are both task-and situation-specific and that individuals make use of these judgments in reference to some type of goal (Bandura, 1986, 1989).

Other self-appraisal construct such as self-concept is a composite view of oneself that is formed. It is defined as an organized configuration of the individual’s perceptions of one’s abilities, characteristics, attitudes and traits (Chiam, 1976). It is concerned with global self-conception that detracts its power of task performance prediction.

Self-esteem, another facet of self-referent differs from perceived self-efficacy because self-esteem refers to the evaluation of self-worth, which depends on cultural values and standards. Whereas, perceived self-efficacy pertains to the judgment of personal capabilities. Judgments of self-worth and of self-capability have no uniform relation (Bandura, 1986). For instance, individuals may perceive themselves efficacious in an activity that does not contribute to their worthiness (e.g., skilled skater). Consequently, self-efficacy is regarded as a self-confident view of one's capabilities to performance and other self-referent thought constructs, which although may be domain specific, are more global and general self-perceptions (Pajares, 1996).

Lastly, perceived self-efficacy is not the same as positive illusions or unrealistic optimism since it is based on experience and does not lead to unreasonable risk taking. Instead, it leads to venturesome behaviour that is within reach of ones capabilities (Schwarzer, 1992).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Researches have suggested that graduate training is often thought to be a prerequisite for gaining necessary skills to be a competent counsellor. Moreover, literatures have indicated that there were differences in counselling self-efficacy percepts as result to counselling skills training (Larson et al., 1992; Melchert et al., 1996; Daus, 1997). These improvements in self-efficacy percepts will then mediate successful counselling tasks performance. Further, with the current awareness and demand for counselling services in the local society, namely in school settings, it is necessary for counsellor trainers, at the forefront of the counselling educational system, be aware of

the effect of training in counselling skills on self-efficacy percepts among counsellor trainees before and after their practicum course in counselling.

To date, there has been no local research conducted solely on counselling self-efficacy among counsellors in training with regards to their counselling skill performance. In line with the concept of self-efficacy, it is predicted that Practicum 1 course counsellor trainees would have higher counselling self-efficacy because they had experienced substantially more feedback from their lectures, performance accomplishments and more learning opportunities to observe others counselling successfully than the Techniques in Counselling course students who were newly exposed to the fundamental counselling skills. It is thus of interest to determine whether counselling self-efficacy estimates is sensitive to changes among trainees in the Techniques in Counselling course and Practicum 1 course. This study will also seek to determine which mode of training and courses offered are perceived significant to promote counselling self-efficacy among counsellor trainees.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is concerned with the nature of counselling self-efficacy estimates among counsellor trainees enrolled in a Masters of Education in Guidance and Counselling course in University of Malaya. In view of the objectives of the study, the following research questions were raised. They are:

1. Are there differences in counselling self-efficacy between counsellor trainees in Techniques in Counselling course and Practicum 1 course counsellor trainees?

2. Which of the four sources of information are perceived significant in promoting counselling self-efficacy during training:
 - (i) mastery experience;
 - (ii) vicarious learning;
 - (iii) verbal persuasion; and
 - (iv) physiological state?
3. What are the courses taken that strongly contributed to the applications of counselling skills among counsellor trainees?

1.4 Significance of the Study

As asserted by Bandura (1986), successful performance behaviour requires not only knowledge and skills but also beliefs that one has the ability to perform the behaviours required to produce particular outcomes. Hence, the potential implications of this study for counsellor training are important. It is clear that most local trainers are not well acquainted regarding the potential effects the self-efficacy concept has on trainees. The self-efficacy theory posited that the higher counselling self-efficacy is, the greater is the likelihood of counsellor approaching, expending more effort, and persisting in counselling behaviours. On these basis, it may prove useful for counsellor trainers or supervisors to give positive performance feedback, modeling and to incorporate frequent hands-on experience to trainees as sources of information (verbal persuasion) to enhance their counselling skills performance. Researchers have also reported that trainees, who

showed a moderate degree of proficiency in counselling skills at the onset of a training programme, appeared to benefit from the training and showed marked improvement post-training (Rushton and Davis, 1992). As such, training techniques or contents and interventions can be modified to bring about relevant changes, aiming to raise both competence and confidence, primarily via sources of self-efficacy information. This is based on the assumptions that by increasing trainees' levels of self-efficacy, their future counselling skill performances might be enhanced. Therefore, it is hoped that results from this study will suggest that confidence in ability to perform counselling skills could be enhanced by the current Practicum 1 training conducted at University of Malaya.

Bandura viewed anxiety as a "co-effect" of self-efficacy percepts in that the level of anxiety is seen to co-vary inversely with the level and strength of self-efficacy expectations i.e. as self-efficacy expectations are increased, anxiety should decrease and vice versa. Thus, interventions focused on increasing self-efficacy percepts via attention to sources of efficacy in information would be useful to counsellor trainers to increase approach (high counselling efficacy) versus avoidance behaviour (low counseling self-efficacy) and, concurrently, decrease anxiety in relationship to counselling behaviour.

It is therefore hoped that answers to the research questions will furnish useful information to counsellor trainers or supervisors and students in evaluating students' progress by assessing their growth in counselling self-efficacy. In addition, the information from this survey can form a basic recommendation to the Guidance and Counselling Division of Ministry of Education as a guideline for the improvement and modification of current guidance and counselling training courses locally.

Such findings will also help to provide empirical support to the predictive value of self-efficacy percepts with regards to future counselling performance. It could also be of use to counsellor educators to enhance recruitment procedures and improve performance in counselling skills among trainees by increasing their level of self-efficacy percepts. It is also necessary to examine which counselling courses taken would have an impact on the counselling self-efficacy estimates of counsellor trainees. According to the norm, areas of knowledge as in courses taken will serve as a guide or source of information to the counsellors' Accreditation Board in determining the number of subjects required for counsellors in order to be eligible for licensing. On this matter, results from this study are hoped to give certain guidelines to the issue of licenses to counsellors. This stringent selection procedure will ensure a certain standard of high caliber licenced counsellor. Licensed counsellors are to have completed the minimum education programmes, had a certain number of hours of supervised training, and have gone through some type of evaluation and screening.

In summary, it would be insightful in light of this study to note the contributions of self-efficacy beliefs as useful educational implications, sensible intervention strategies, and practical ways to alter self-efficacy beliefs when they are inaccurate and debilitating to counsellor trainees. Lastly, it is also hoped that this study will pave the way for further studies on counselling self-efficacy among counsellors and counsellor trainees in the local context.

1.5 Operational Definitions

Self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1986), means “people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances”.

Counselling self-efficacy, defined by Daus (1997) is the conviction that one can successfully execute counselling behaviours that are required to produce therapeutic outcomes.

Counselling skills refers to the various counselling skills normally used in the practice of counselling individuals. It includes interviewing skills, attending skills, and listening skills specified by Carkhuff (1983) and Ivey (1971). It also includes the client centered fundamental skills of empathy, respect and genuineness (Rogers, 1951).

Individual counselling refers to the process whereby a counsellor helps a client for as long as necessary to resolve a problem or a personal conflict of the client. Individual counselling differs from group counselling in that group counselling refers to the dynamic interaction and sharing between collections of individuals having similar concerns.

Counsellor trainees refer to the Masters of Education in Guidance and Counselling students in University of Malaya. These counsellor trainees were from two different courses. The Techniques in Counselling course students were those exposed to the specific techniques, procedures and intervention methods while conducting counselling sessions. This course is a prerequisite course before students are allowed to enroll in the Practicum 1 course. The Practicum 1 course students will have hands-on experience working with clients and employing appropriate counselling techniques

learned from their Techniques in Counselling course. Students with prior background and experience in counselling were excluded in the survey.

Techniques in Counselling course refers to the PPGS6104 course. As described by the university manual provided to all Masters level students, the course intends to give a basic introduction on the basic counselling techniques, the environment and counselling ethics. The content of the course includes, what is counselling; the counsellor as a person and as a professional; personal characteristics of effective counsellor; counselling ethics; stages in counselling process. The course consisted of fourteen (14) weekly three-hour sessions, with additional work assignments between the sessions. Teaching methods include role-play, mock-counselling interview, discussion and feedback. Assessment are based on written assignment and practical mock-counselling interviews. The overall training provided attempts to provide a level of understanding on the characteristics of an effective counsellor and listening and attending skills.

Practicum 1 course refers to PPGS6106. As stated in the university manual, this course aims to facilitate development of counselling skills necessary to facilitate effective counselling relationship. Emphasis will be given to overall understanding on applications of skills and problems encountered in the actual practice of counselling. It is assumed that all students have acquired the basic counselling skills required to conduct counselling interviews. The course consists of fourteen (14) weekly three-hour sessions. Students are to produce six to seven audio tape-recorded counselling sessions with voluntary clients, independently of lecturers' supervision. The tapes will be reviewed in class each week and followed by an in-dept discussion. The discussion will focus on the counselling skills applied, observing aspects of interpersonal behaviour and performance,

and any issues arising from it the trainee's counselling session. All students have the opportunity to give ideas and feedback, and opportunity to try out basic counselling skills with their respective clients. The final session of the course allows trainees to put forward issues arising from the course and give general feedback about the training. Evaluation will be based on the audio tape-recorded assignments.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study will have the following limitations:

1. This study will only involve students currently undergoing Practicum 1 course and the Techniques in Counselling course at University of Malaya.
2. It is limited to only one graduate counselling training programme at University of Malaya; generalization to all graduates counselling programmes is premature.
3. The counsellor trainees in this study were mostly women, and generalizability to men may be limited.