

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

The major purpose of this study was to determine the effects of the Practicum 1 course and the Techniques in Counselling courses on the counselling self-efficacy percepts among counsellor trainees in University of Malaya. According to the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977,1982), it is believed that counsellor trainees who have low self-efficacy for accomplishing a particular counselling task would tend to respond to items in the CSES with less confidence, whereas those who feel more efficacious would tend to respond to items with relatively more confidence. Based on these tenets, it is hypothesized that trainees' counselling self-efficacy scores of CSES would increase over a course of a semester of Practicum 1 course because of the exposure to counselling knowledge and performance accomplishments compared to trainees in the Techniques in Counselling course who are newly introduced to the basic counselling skills and limited chances of hands-on practice on skills learned.

5.1 Discussion

In the present study, however, results from the t-test were not significant, suggesting that both the Practicum 1 and Techniques in Counselling courses have no distinct different effects on the counsellor trainees' counselling self-efficacy percepts. Hence, there was no evidence that counselling self-efficacy have increased as trainees have had more training in counselling skills during the Practicum 1 course, contrary to

conclusions drawn from a number of literature reviews. It appears that results from this finding are inconsistent with the earlier findings (Johnson et al., 1989; Larson, et al., 1992; Watson, 1993; Melchert et al., 1996; Daus, 1997), postulating that different levels of counselling training groups differed with respect to counselling self-efficacy strength.

Hence, the question arises as to why there is no significant different impact on counselling self-efficacy of both groups arises. It is clear that a semester long of training in Practicum 1 course did not result in significant self-efficacy improvement for all Practicum 1 course trainees as expected. The results of the findings do not concur with many previous studies put forward in the literature review. However, it is important to point out that the training provided at University of Malaya was designed to help trainees develop the skills and knowledge necessary to work effectively with individual clients, and to encourage trainees to develop for themselves useful strategies for dealing with their current and future circumstances. Nevertheless, based on the total of eleven compulsory courses provided under the Guidance and Counselling programme, eight courses were theoretical in nature and only three courses i.e. Techniques in Counselling, Practicum 1, and Practicum II focused on practical skills training. In sum, the Masters programme leans toward theory and only a couple of courses in the Guidance and Counselling course programme provides counselling related experience and training. The overall training approach in the Practicum 1 course attempts to provide a deeper and practical understanding to apply the basic counselling skills learned from the previous course i.e. the Techniques in Counselling. Besides practicing counselling skills on clients, trainees get a chance to observe other course-mates' audio tape recorded counselling sessions, hold discussions and obtain feedback from lecturers and course-mates on their

performance and any issues arising from it. At the end of the course, trainees are to submit a self-assessment of their progress. It is noted that trainees were not required to express feedback regarding the training provided. Upon completion of the Practicum 1 course trainees are assumed to have developed the necessary requisite counselling skills to conduct successful counselling sessions. This form of training indeed contrasts to the training programmes received by trainees in most of the literature reviews.

It should be noted that, the Practicum 1 course under study has different training procedures, course content and length of training compared to the concept of Practicum in literatures. Most noteworthy, the training provided in the present study is unlike the micro-counselling provided in literatures that are laboratory based. The Practicum 1 course in University of Malaya is based basically on audio recorded sessions of counsellor trainees-client counselling interviews to help in supervision. This is definitely different from the form of training found in literatures which require trainees to undergo internship or field practicum in selected work settings such as community clinics or a supervised internship in selected colleges or schools after practicum training in universities (Nugent, 1994). According to ACA standards, it is unethical for counsellor educators to expose counsellor trainees to only one counselling theory and setting. The ACA Code of Ethics (1988) says, "*Members must present thoroughly varied theoretical positions so that students may make comparisons and have the opportunity to select a position*" (Section H-10) (see Appendix B). Given a broad background of experience, counsellor trainees could independently assess the value of contemporary counselling practices, and evaluate new counselling theories and techniques. Thus, as suggested in literature reviews, effective supervised experiences work best if all trainees first engage

in practicum training in university laboratory or micro-counselling with close supervision from lecturers and then proceed with supervised internships or field practicum at selected work placement setting. Unlike the current local programme under study, trainees who enter the counselling programme at University of Malaya, undergo the practicum session unsupervised and only receive feedback from their lecturers based on the audio-tape results of the concluded sessions. Hence, trainees do not receive regular ongoing supervision during their sessions with clients nor undergo internship or field practicum after the course from their supervisors as found in literature reviews. In short, results from this finding suggests that the training programme in the current study lacks the continued practicum component equivalent to the practicum reflected in reviewed literatures (Friendlander & Snyder, 1983; Rushton & Davis, 1992).

Unlike the Practicum 1 course, the Practicum 2 (PPGS6109), which was only offered in 1998/1999 session, is the extension of Practicum 1 and more of a laboratory style micro-counselling training which will enable trainees to practice skills learned. Focus will be on supervisor's supervision on at least one full counselling case to help trainees learn to work independently on a 'real' counselling setting, similar to training programmes mentioned in most literature reviews (e.g. Johnson et al., 1989 ; Thomas et al., 1989; Ivey & Authier, 1978) where it was demonstrated that microskills training in a laboratory style is effective in training and increases counselling self-efficacy among counsellor trainees as compared to counsellor trainees who have not received their form of training. Therefore, it is essential that trainees be provided with micro-counselling training in a lab facility and internship to facilitate better skills development as they progress. In my opinion, further supervision, either in a lab facility training or internship

(field practicum) is indeed vital in facilitating the process of developing and integrating a trainee's skills repertoires. In short, the present training programme could be improved to bring about relevant changes in the level of trainees' percepts of counselling self-efficacy by extending the Practicum 1 course training to Practicum 2. Further research may be required to pursue the issue on the effects of the Practicum 2 course on trainees' efficacy belief.

The results of the present study, with respect to counselling self-efficacy percepts also demonstrated that the counsellor trainees' evaluation of their efficacy based on performance failure and not performance accomplishments. It is clear that if most of the respondents answered the CSES inventory by judging and reflecting on the number of failures they had during counselling sessions and not on the number of success they had with clients, it could be concluded that their answers on the inventory would reflect themselves with low self-efficacy and will not accurately portray how they feel they would perform as a counsellor in a counselling situation based on success performance counts. Bandura (1982) asserted that only performance accomplishment cases should self-efficacy increase: it should decrease in performance failure cases. Thus, counsellor trainees in practicum course were expected to have higher CSES scores than techniques in counselling (prepracticum) course trainees because they have had successfully counselled more clients, observed more successful counselling sessions from course-mates, and received more positive feedback. However, they also may have experienced more failure experiences. Therefore, the premise that the counselling experience was assumed to be a performance accomplishment for all the subjects need to be re-looked for it may not have been a successful one. This is supported by prior researches, which

suggested that the debilitating effect of failure is greater than the facilitating effect of success (Feather, 1996; Feather & Saville, 1967; Heath, 1961). At a minimum, future research should ask subjects to indicate the degree and the number of success and failure cases of their counselling skill performance, vicarious learning and verbal support during training in order to increase the rigor of the research design. The indicated number of measure of success and failure could then be used as additional predicting variables.

With these thoughts in mind, the present study demonstrated that the Techniques in Counselling course trainees, as beginners are more likely to mistrust their own judgments, and may attribute their mistrust to inexperience and anxiety for not being able to grasp between what is right and wrong of counselling, and this will be reflected in their assessment of counselling self-efficacy percepts. More advanced trainees, as in the Practicum 1 course group may view their lack of counselling self-efficacy due to the lack of competence and ability to work independently, without the guidance of their lecturers while conducting the counselling sessions on their own. Stoltenberg (1981) postulated that beginning counsellors or newly graduated counsellors are expected to be unilaterally dependent on supervisor according to his model of counsellor complexity. Beginning counsellors, are indeed unsure of themselves and are rarely able to avoid anxiety during early counselling sessions. With Stoltenberg's findings, it is clear that beginning counsellor are affected by anxiety during counselling and hence trainees undergoing training would also be affected by it. Another finding documented by Yager and Beck (1981) found that counsellor trainees' fear stem from: (1) irrational beliefs concerning "the perfect responses," (2) academic coursework which seems to equate psychological illness with poor counselling skills; (3) uncertainty about necessary skills; (4) anxiety

engendered by the change process. They noted that practicum training does affect counsellor trainees performance and that highly anxious counsellor trainees are less effective in counselling with clients and tend to have low counselling self-efficacy percepts.

A number of authors have noted that many beginners express the wish that their supervisors give them straightforward answers about the rights and wrongs in counselling sessions (e.g. Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981). Evidence provided by Worthington & Roehlke (1979), showed that most beginning practicum counselor trainees perceived counselling skills that are directly taught or modeled to them, supervisors sharing their own counselling experiences, providing assessment and treatment literature, and providing structure during initial supervisory sessions, as important in training. They added that beginning counselling students are often unsure of how to act as counsellors and, consequently, are possibly threatened by evaluation of their counselling behaviours. Thus, counsellor trainees are lack of self-confidence in conducting counselling. From the number of suggestions received from survey respondents on the need to enhance their skills in the Practicum II course, it clearly indicates that the trainees should be exposed to more skills especially in the problem solving stage and treatment strategies. It is indeed difficult for trainees to determine if their counselling sessions had help in clients' change and resulted in 'effective' outcomes and therapeutic change resulting from the skills they applied. These uncertainties may engender feelings of anxiety or negative self-evaluation of their counselling skills efficacy as reflected by scores of CSES in both groups. Pajares (1996) contends that the mediational role of judgment of self-efficacy in human behaviour is a complex one. Thus,

it is important to know the precise nature of skills required to successfully perform a particular behaviour. When counsellor trainees are uncertain about the required skills to execute successful counselling performance, their efficacy judgments can mislead them. More complex yet, individuals often perceive their ability as only partially mastered, feeling more competent about some components than about others. How they focus on and appraise these components will strongly affect their sense of efficacy about the task to be undertaken. To confirm or disconfirm these speculations, replication of his study is needed to compare the responses of Practicum 1 group and the Techniques in Counselling group on ability to work independently, anxiety level, and how far they have mastered each skill.

Interestingly, it is noted that during the Techniques in Counselling course (prior to practicum), most trainees were exposed to and taught to apply counselling skills interactions and various verbal responses to facilitate client exploration, understanding, and action. These responses included clarification, paraphrase, reflection, summarization, probes, confrontation, interpretation, and information giving. Each of these skills was demonstrated separately during role-play, interaction or mock counselling sessions between trainer and trainees during classes. However, in actuality, these counselling skills are blended together and counsellor trainees who proceed to the practicum course might find it difficult to integrate them themselves in some meaningful, coherent fashion to facilitate successful counselling session (Cormier & Cormier, 1985). Hence, results from the findings did not reflect trainees' increase in counselling self-efficacy after a semester of Practicum 1 training compared to the Techniques in Counselling group as expected.

As findings failed to confirm significant differences in counselling self-efficacy between Practicum 1 group and the Techniques in Counselling group as in previous researches, the following conceptual framework documented by Hill, Charles & Reed (1981) drawn from a few articles may offer an explanation on how trainees' progress through training can be applied in the present study but may not apply completely to any individual counsellor trainee. Trainees in the Techniques in Counselling course (i.e. without prior background in counselling) would learn to do counselling "the right way" and adopt whatever style of counselling being offered. Usually trainees will latch on the style or model exposed and uses this counselling style exclusively, regardless of client's needs. During the Practicum 1 phase, the trainees become very anxious about evaluations of his or her competence and tend to focus on himself or herself rather than on the clients. Therefore, if the style that was adopted does not fit (and it rarely does), the trainee might feel that he or she is a failure rather than that the style adopted does not fit his or her style. Hence, this dogmatic approach may elicit low counselling self-efficacy due to the believed failure to help clients 'solve' their concerns. Results from other study (e.g. Bowman & Roberts, 1979; Costa, 1994; Yager & Beck, 1981) concluded that counselling session is anxiety evoking for trainees and anxiety is accounted for by trainees expectations to perform well (Bowman & Roberts, 1979).

Yet, it is probable that the different styles and orientations exposed to the trainees during their Techniques in Counselling and Practicum 1 course by different lecturers may be counterproductive to performing counselling skills. Thus, the different styles do not correlate and would create disruption and anxiety among trainees as a result. When both styles learned in different courses do not work together, this would create anxiety.

Specifically, anxiety among trainees would effect their counselling self-efficacy percepts. This is supported by Friendlander, Keller, Peca-Baker, & Olk (1986), that anxiety is inversely related to the strength of trainees' self-efficacy expectations. In short, anxiety would lead counsellor trainees to experience low self-efficacy on their performance.

Results from other studies (e.g. Bowman & Roberts, 1979; Costa, 1994; Yager & Beck, 1981) concluded that counselling session is anxiety evoking for trainees and anxiety is accounted for by trainees expectations (Bowman & Roberts, 1979), that is the need to bring about changes or to "cure" the client. Therefore, as suggested earlier, in future, more research is needed to explore whether anxiety suppresses percepts of counselling self-efficacy. In short, as posited by Corey, Corey & Callanan (1988), particular techniques may be better suited to some counsellor's personalities and styles of counselling than others. Thus, counsellor trainees techniques should fit ones' counselling style, and trainees should feel comfortable in using them to enhance performance.

Also noteworthy was the finding that male trainees had a higher mean of CSES scores in both groups compared to the female trainees. These results are consistent with findings reported by Thomas et al., (1989) that male participants perceived higher levels of self-efficacy both before and after the counselling skills training, than did female participants.

However, in most of other previous samples under study, there were no differences in self-efficacy between male and female participants (e.g., Carlozzi & Hurlburt, 1982; Hoffman, 1977; Petro & Hansen, 1977). A study by Fong and Borders (1985) reported that gender had no significant effects on self-efficacy of counselling skills but sex role orientation had a significant effect on counselling skills scores and

counsellor response effectiveness before and after training. However, since 85% of the present sample were predominantly female, these results cannot be generalized. In an attempt to address if gender difference affect counselling self-efficacy, further research is needed to examine whether the present adopted and modified construct of CSES favours men, or whether the present inventory contains a 'male bias' and why in such instances gender differences emerge and in others not.

Evidence that percepts of counselling self-efficacy are amenable to increase is indicated by the sample. A majority of the trainees (60%) found having hands-on training counselling experience with clients, help to increase their counselling self-efficacy percepts. Receiving constructive feedback from lecturers and course-mates (25%) follows this. Therefore, it could be concluded that that practicing skills with clients and a supportive supervisory relationship with trainer relating positive feedback on their performance instead of disparaging comments would help increases self-efficacy level. This concurs with the study by Costa (1994) that supervisors could minimize anxiety by creating positive evaluation focus. As found by Friedlander et al. (1986), anxiety was significantly inverse with counselor self-efficacy. Hence, positive feedback from supervisors would produce more favorable trainee responses and performance.

Counsellor trainees too indicated that both the Techniques in Counselling and the Practicum 1 course did contribute to trainees counselling skills enhancement compared to other courses, however, there were no significant difference found between the counselling self-efficacy percepts of both groups. In addition, 73% of the respondents noted that the Practicum 2 course should be offered for it would help improve their counselling self-efficacy.

5.2 Summary and Suggestions

In general, this finding suggests that:

- i) both the training courses under study, which emphasized training in basic counselling skills and practice with clients was perceived by trainees helpful in their counselling skills application during counselling sessions;
- ii) contrary to literature reviewed, no significant differences in counselling self-efficacy of both group were found. This may be attributed to the different course content or curriculum and different training setting and facilities;
- iii) the concept and course content of practicum training in present study differs from the form of practicum provided in literature reviews. The supervised micro-counselling training in laboratory and supervised internship are not provided in the Masters of Education in Guidance and Counselling programme in the present study.
- iv) a supportive supervisory alliance (i.e. positive feedback and directly address anxiety and uncertainties among trainees) and encouraging independence and extensive experience (i.e. one-to one counselling experience with voluntary clients without supervisors presents) are perceived to be important posite factors to influence change in trainees' counselling self-efficacy over time;.
- v) maintenance and improvement of skills learned in Practicum 1 course can be further enhanced through on-going supervision via Practicum 2 course. Greater exposure to apply trainees acquired counselling skills in the

practicum environment will improve trainees' confidence and further enhance efficacy in counselling skills application.

The potential implications of this study for counsellor training and research provide a foundation for further research base to establish or refute these findings. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to counsellor trainees' variables (e.g. ethnicity, experience, and age). In the future, researchers need to increase the size and diversity of the samples (e.g. include trainees with prior counselling background) and extend to other populations (e.g. trainees from other universities). There is also a need for further data pertaining to the validity of the self-efficacy methodology employed. In addition, self-efficacy must be checked periodically to assess the effect of experience on skills competence. Counselling self-efficacy can then be measured at the beginning and end of the semester on the same group of participants.

Nevertheless, the present findings do offer preliminary a idea on the effects of the training provided on the counselling self-efficacy of trainees. It is hoped that this study will provide some useful information to policy makers, curriculum planners, and counsellor trainers to guide them to help increase trainees' self-efficacy in their counselling skills abilities namely through training and experience, which in turn enhances their ability to perform counselling activities professionally. Finally, it is hoped that this study may help trainers to realize that if they can instill self-efficacy in trainees by helping through the four sources of self-efficacy:

- 1) hands-on successful performance experience;
- 2) support and encouragement;
- 3) observing models; and

4) by reducing emotional arousal (e.g. negative self-belief and anxiety),

then they will be accomplishing their roles as humanistic educators, to nurture total well being of trainees and to further foster social and mental growth by having produced highly professional and efficacious counsellors.