

The Role of Guidance Counselors in Supporting the Emotional Well-being of Children with Special Needs at SKH Negeri 2 Lebak

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak. This study uses qualitative research with a case study approach, with the research subjects being guidance counselors represented by special assistant teachers or homeroom teachers. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis techniques used were data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher used triangulation of sources to obtain data validity. Based on the study, it can be concluded that the role of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak includes several important functions, namely as a source of information, a source of guidance, a source of support, and a source of guidance. The researcher used triangulation of sources to obtain data validity. Based on the study, it can be concluded that the role of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak includes several important functions, namely as a source of information, a source of guidance, a source of support, and a source of guidance. The researcher used triangulation of sources to obtain data validity. Based on the research, it can be concluded that the role of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak includes several important functions, namely as communicators, facilitators, motivators, and advisors who help children manage their emotions and foster good social relationships. In addition, guidance counselors also collaborate with homeroom teachers and parents to create an environment that supports the emotional development of children with special needs. The strategies implemented include structured guidance and the use of appropriate techniques to help children manage their emotions and improve their overall psychosocial well-being.

Keywords : Counseling Teacher, Children With Special Needs, Emotional Well Being

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a strategic role in the success of a nation's education. With the primary responsibility of educating, guiding, and developing the potential of students, teachers are the main pillars in shaping the character of the next generation (Viratama, 2024). Children who grow and develop differently from other children are known as Children with Special Needs (ABK). Children with special needs are children who require special assistance because their

conditions differ from those of typical children. This term does not usually apply to children with physical or psychological problems (Yahdinil & Fauzan, 2024).

In Indonesia, the number of children with special needs (ABK) continues to increase. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2023) shows that there are around 1.6 million school-age ABK, but only 18% have access to formal education. This condition indicates that there are still significant challenges in providing adequate inclusive education services, including emotional well-being support for ABK.

Emotional well-being is a crucial aspect in child development, especially for ABK. According to (Rahmawati & Suryadi, 2019), emotional well-being includes happiness, life satisfaction, and a balance between positive and negative emotions experienced by a person. (Lestari & Ngatini, 2020) expanded on this concept by emphasizing psychological dimensions such as self-acceptance, personal growth, and emotional regulation skills. (Desiningrum et al., 2019) added that the psychological well-being of children with special needs also includes optimal social functioning, including the ability to adapt to the environment.

The emotional development of children with special needs has unique characteristics that differ from those of typical children. They often experience difficulties in recognizing, understanding, and expressing emotions appropriately (Somantri, 2018). Research shows that children with special needs have a higher risk of experiencing emotional and social problems, including difficulties adapting and interacting with their environment, compared to typical children (Mangunsong, 2018). This condition can have a negative impact on their academic achievement, social interaction, and overall quality of life.

Several recent studies have explored various aspects of emotional support for children with special needs. (Kurniawati's, 2023) study identified strategies for the social-emotional development of children with special needs in early childhood education, but it focused on early childhood and did not explore the specific role of guidance counselors. The study by (Afridah et al., 2022) discusses emotional well-being in the context of street vendors, highlighting the importance of social support, but does not specifically address the special education setting.

Recent research shows that school-based interventions involving counseling teachers can significantly improve the emotional well-being of children with special needs. (Widiastuti & Astuti, 2021) found that the role of school counselors is very important in improving students' psychological well-being through a holistic approach. Astuti and (Widiastuti, 2020) identified various strategies used by guidance counselors in dealing with the emotional problems of children with special needs, but did not explore their implementation in depth in special schools.

In Indonesia, although inclusive education has been regulated in Permendikbud No. 72 of 2016, its implementation still faces various challenges, including the limited number and competence of trained guidance counselors to handle children with special needs (Sunardi et al., 2022; Zulkifli & Hamid, 2020). (Wardani & Julaela, 2019) emphasize the importance of strengthening the professional capabilities of teachers in the education of children with special needs, but this is still limited to pedagogical aspects and does not focus on emotional well-being.

The identified research gaps are: (1) limited empirical research on the specific role of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs in special schools in Indonesia; (2) minimal documentation of best practices of guidance counselors in the context of special education; and (3) the absence of in-depth studies on specific strategies and techniques used by guidance counselors to improve the emotional well-being of children with special needs.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore and describe in depth the role of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak, including the strategies, techniques, and challenges faced in their implementation. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of a guidance counseling service model for children with special needs and provide practical implications for improving the quality of special education services in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research was conducted at SKHN 2 Lebak using qualitative research methodology. According to Erikson, qualitative research is an intensive and thorough investigation process of what is happening in the field through analytical reflection on documents and evidence, presented descriptively or directly quoting interview results. According to Setyosari, qualitative research is research that uses observation, interviews, content analysis, and other data collection methods to present responses from the subjects' behavior. As for the data collection techniques used, according to Creswell, several data collection techniques that can be carried out in the case study research method include: Observation, Interviews, Materials, Audio-visual, Documentation, and Reports (Pahleviannur, 2022').

RESULTS

Based on data analysis, four main roles of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak were identified. The following is a description of each role accompanied by direct quotes from informants:

Guidance counselors serve as a bridge of communication between students, parents, and the school. Ms. Neli explained, *"I always try to establish open communication with the children. For example, when a child has a tantrum, I don't immediately reprimand them, but I approach them calmly and gently ask them how they feel. Sometimes they can't speak clearly, but from their gestures and facial expressions, I can understand what they want."* (Interview, August 10, 2024)

Observations show that guidance counselors use various communication strategies, including: Simple verbal communication: Using short sentences and words that are easy to understand, Non-verbal communication: Reading children's body language, facial expressions, and gestures, and Active listening: Giving full attention when children speak without interruption. Guidance counselors also communicate regularly with parents through communication books and monthly meetings to report on children's emotional development.

As facilitators, guidance counselors provide various media and activities to help children express and manage their emotions. Ms. Neli shared, *"I often use games to help children learn to control their emotions. For example, the 'red-green light' game to practice self-*

control. When the light is red, they must stop and take a deep breath. It's simple but effective for training them to manage their emotions." (Interview, August 24, 2024)

The facilitation strategies implemented include:

Table 1. Facilitation strategies

| Types of Activities | Objectives | Frequency |
|-------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Emotional Regulation Games | Practice self-control | 3 times a week |
| Storytelling | Teach empathy and emotional understanding | 2 times a week |
| Expressive Arts (drawing, coloring) | Media for expressing feelings | Every day |
| Role-playing Social Situations | Practice social skills | 1 time a week |

The guidance counselor also facilitates the use of an "emotion corner" in the classroom, which is a special corner with pictures of emotional expressions that help children identify their feelings.

The guidance counselor provides positive encouragement to boost the confidence and learning motivation of children with special needs. Mrs. Neli's experience: *"Every child has strengths, and my job is to discover and develop them. There is a child who really loves music, even though he has difficulty communicating. I always praise him when he successfully imitates the rhythm, and slowly his confidence has increased. Now he is more confident performing in front of his friends."* (Interview, September 7, 2024)

Motivation techniques used:

1. Positive reinforcement: Giving specific praise and simple rewards for positive behavior
2. Goal setting: Setting small, achievable targets to build a sense of accomplishment
3. Modeling: Demonstrating examples of positive behavior that children can imitate
4. Celebration of progress: Celebrating every bit of progress, no matter how small

The guidance counselor provides guidance and direction to help children understand themselves and develop problem-solving skills. Ms. Neli explains: *"When children fight with their friends, I don't punish them immediately. I invite them to talk one by one, ask them what happened, how they feel, and how best to resolve the problem. It's a long process, but they learn to understand the consequences of their behavior."* (Interview, September 21, 2024)

Types of guidance provided:

1. Individual guidance: One-on-one counseling sessions for specific emotional problems
2. Group guidance: Small group discussions about social rules and emotion management
3. Collaboration with parents: Providing advice and guidance to parents on how to support their children's emotional development at home

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the role of guidance counselors at SKHN 2 Lebak is in line with the ecological approach, which emphasizes the importance of support systems in

child development (Mangunsong, 2018). Guidance counselors serve as an important element in the child's immediate environment, providing direct support that affects their emotional well-being.

The communicator role of guidance counselors reflects the principles of therapeutic communication in a client-centered counseling approach. The empathy, unconditional acceptance, and authenticity applied by guidance counselors allow children with special needs to feel safe to express their emotions. This is consistent with the findings of (Aprilia & Sari, 2021), who stated that the quality of the teacher-student relationship is a significant predictor of students' mental well-being.

The use of games and concrete activities as a medium for learning emotional regulation is in line with the principles of experience-based learning. ABK, who generally have kinesthetic and visual learning styles, benefit more from learning that involves direct experience (Yuwono & Mirnawati, 2021). These findings reinforce (Kurniawati's, 2023) research, which shows the effectiveness of activity-based strategies in improving the social-emotional skills of ABK.

The role of guidance counselors as motivators contributes to increasing the self-confidence of children with special needs. Providing positive reinforcement and setting appropriate goals helps children build confidence in their ability to manage their emotions and face challenges. Research by (Desiningrum et al., 2019) also found that support from teachers can significantly improve the psychological well-being of children with special needs.

One important finding is the importance of collaboration between guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, and parents. This is in line with the comprehensive guidance service model that emphasizes a holistic approach and involves all stakeholders (Nurhidayah & Agustanico, 2021). (Viratama, 2024) also emphasizes that social support from various parties is very important for the success of children with special needs' education. This collaboration creates consistency in emotional support across various settings, which is crucial for the generalization of the emotional regulation skills learned by children.

This study also identified several challenges, including: (1) limited time for individual guidance due to high teacher-student ratios; (2) highly diverse emotional needs among children with special needs; and (3) limited access to advanced training on emotional interventions for children with special needs. These findings are consistent with studies by (Sunardi et al., 2022) and (Zulkifli & Hamid, 2020) on the challenges of implementing inclusive education in Indonesia, particularly regarding the competence of guidance counselors in handling children with special needs.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies four main roles of guidance counselors in supporting the emotional well-being of children with special needs at SKHN 2 Lebak: communicator, facilitator, motivator, and advisor. Through empathetic communication, provision of appropriate learning media, positive motivation, and structured guidance, guidance counselors contribute significantly to improving the emotional regulation and psychosocial well-being of children with special needs.

The findings of this study enrich the literature on counseling practices in special education in Indonesia. This study shows that a holistic and collaborative approach in guidance and counseling services can accommodate the complex and diverse emotional needs of children with special needs.

For special education practitioners, this study provides several recommendations:

1. For Guidance Counselors: Develop therapeutic communication skills and mastery of various emotional intervention techniques appropriate for students with diverse characteristics.
2. For Schools: Provide dedicated time for individual counseling, facilitate ongoing training for guidance counselors, and develop effective collaboration systems between guidance counselors, classroom teachers, and parents.
3. For Policy Makers: Develop competency standards for guidance counselors in special education, provide specialized training programs, and ensure an ideal guidance counselor-student ratio for optimal services.

This study has several limitations: (1) it was conducted in only one school with one main informant, so the findings may not be generalizable to other special school contexts; (2) the limited observation period (2 months) may not have captured the full dynamics of the guidance counselor's role throughout the school year; and (3) this study did not directly involve the perspectives of students and parents as data sources.

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