

## **Improving school counselors' personal quality through collaboration with parents a phenomenological Study among school counselors in junior high schools**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore and describe the essence of collaboration activities conducted by school counselors with parents from the perspective of school counselors. This transcendental phenomenological study consisted of several stages: identifying phenomena, bracketing, data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. It involved six male and female school counselors from various junior high schools as participants. They have different backgrounds and lengths of service, allowing diverse interpretations of collaboration. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, supported by supplementary data. The results and discussions are categorized into four sections: existing collaboration programs in schools, the experiences of collaboration held by the counselors, the personal significance of collaboration, and the enhancement of personal quality acquired through collaboration. Future studies are recommended to explore efforts to enhance collaboration skills in prospective school counselors, the need for developing a digital platform for parent-school counselor collaboration, and the necessity of providing continuous training to school counselors to improve collaboration skills.

**Keywords:** Collaboration; School Counselor; Parents; Personal Quality

### **Introduction**

Collaboration is a strategy that must be undertaken by school counselor with the aim of optimizing performance, achieving the service outcomes, and optimizing the development of students (Amalia et al., 2023; Mangerang, 2021). It is known that students are only in school during school hours, while the remaining time is spent outside school beyond the reach of School counselors (Abdullah, 2019). Students can be in tutorial places, recreational environments, places for spiritual activities, and most commonly, at home with their families. Since Guidance and counseling services are continuous, the task of School counselors in developing positive character, fostering independence, assigning tasks, and so forth needs to be followed up by others outside the school. The primary party responsible in this regard is the family, especially parents (Novela and Yulsyofriend, 2019; Anawaty, 2020; Aprilia, Shofia, and Sari, 2021; Kusumawardani, 2023; Putra, et al., 2023; Purwaningrum, 2023).

Parents can be biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, or other forms of student guardians (Ismoyowati, 2011; Ramadhani, Djunaedi, Sismiati, 2016; Susanti, 2018). The cultural diversity in Indonesia allows students not always to reside in their respective homes and not always be with their biological parents. Regardless of who assumes the role of a parent, they are responsible for the student when outside school. This facilitates the monitoring of students' personal-social, academic, and career development, allowing them to grow into individuals with outstanding conditions (Novita and Budiman, 2015; Rakhmawati, 2015; Ngewa, 2021).

In order to establish collaboration with students' parents, School counselors require a set of collaboration skills to be applied. Some collaboration skills that need enhancement include communication skills (Taufik, 2018; Triwardhani, et al., 2020; Rosita, Suherman, and Nurhaqy, 2022), influencing skills (Taufik, 2018), skills in appreciating parents (Putri and Suyanto, 2016; Rantauwati, 2019), information receiving and providing skills (Supriyanto,

2016; Fatmawati, 2020; Triwardhani, et al., 2020), problem-solving skills (Widodo, 2009; Chan and Clarke, 2017), and several other skills. However, the success of collaboration between School counselors and parents is not solely influenced by the competence of proficient School counselors but also by other factors (Dor, 2012; Qadafy, 2019; Kasmawati, 2020; Purwaningrum, 2023). Therefore, sometimes the established collaboration does not always proceed as expected.

The collaboration between school counselors and parents holds significant importance in supporting the development and well-being of students (Alwina, 2023; Sandra et al., 2022). School counselors can provide valuable insights into the academic, social, and emotional development of students. By sharing information, School counselors and parents can work together to better understand the needs and potential of students. School counselors can help identify social or emotional issues that may impact a student's performance or well-being. Collaboration allows School counselors and parents to work together in designing effective intervention strategies (Griffiths et al., 2021).

Collaboration also facilitates parents in providing unique insights into the home environment and its influence on students. School counselors can use this information to design approaches that better suit the needs. Open and transparent communication helps build trust among all parties involved (Lee & Li, 2021; Sari et al., 2020). With strong collaboration between School counselors and parents, an educational environment that supports the holistic development of students can be created. It also provides an opportunity to design more precise and effective interventions for each issue faced by students.

The level of issues faced by students, parents' socioeconomic conditions, and parents' openness to receiving information pose challenges in the collaboration process (Indria et al., 2021). Nevertheless, School counselors still need to organize collaboration in Guidance and counseling services at school. The success of collaboration is proportional to the possible failures that may occur during the process. This research aims to depict the internal conditions of School counselors who strive to consistently collaborate with students' parents in solving problems and nurturing students' interests and potentials.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design to explore the enhancement of School counselor competence through collaboration with students' parents. Six participants were involved in the research. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and documentation. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews in phenomenological studies is to obtain the meaning of the phenomena experienced by individuals from their own perspectives. Documentation was carried out by examining School counselor activity records during collaboration with students' parents. The records encompassed the types of issues faced, the level of parents' needs for collaboration, forms of collaboration, problem-solving processes, and efforts to achieve the goals set in collaboration. Data analysis followed Moustakas' steps, including the stages of epoches. The data analysis stages were as follows: 1) the phenomenological reduction stage, 2) the imagination variation stage, and 3) the essence acquisition stage.

## **Result and Discussion**

Collaboration with parents emerges as an intriguing phenomenon in providing Guidance and counseling services for students in schools. All research participants have encountered collaboration with parents, albeit with varied experiences. On average, the schools

where the participants perform their duties as School counselors do not have specific programs for collaborating with parents.

*"The school does not have an explicit collaboration program, but School counselors still engage in collaboration with parents periodically. Collaboration is carried out through both online and face-to-face feedback. The collaboration initiated by School counselors in the school involves providing information related to the academic and non-academic development of students and discussing issues that students encounter during the learning process at school." (Teacher 3)*

The absence of collaboration between School counselors and parents may result from a lack of understanding of the importance of collaboration, a sense of sufficiency in working alone, insufficient support from the organization, or the perception that collaboration is an incidental activity that does not need to be programmed but can be done at any time (Ramdani et al., 2020). This situation has both positive and negative impacts on its implementation. Ideally, schools should facilitate teachers with programs that streamline collaboration among teachers and parents.

The positive impact of the absence of a collaboration program in schools allows for the emergence of School counselors' creativity in conducting collaborative services even without programming, a heightened sense of responsibility to provide the best service to students and their families, and the growth of interdependence between School counselors and parents for the positive development of students. On the other hand, a negative impact that may be encountered is that ultimately collaboration activities are problem-based. Matters unrelated to student issues are often overlooked, whereas the goal of collaboration is to enhance the positive development of students in school, not solely to resolve problems (Ramdani et al., 2020).

Despite the absence of a written collaboration program, all participants stated that they have engaged in collaboration with students' parents incidentally at their respective schools. Collaboration is conducted in two forms: as a preventive effort and as a curative effort. Both are necessary conditions for improving service quality. As a preventive effort, School counselors' collaboration with parents aims to identify current issues in the school environment and teenage life in general, providing students with skills to prevent problems from arising. As a curative effort, collaboration is undertaken if School counselors or parents identify difficulties experienced by students that require assistance through cooperation (McConnell et al., 2020). Through these efforts, it is hoped that students can grow better and overcome their difficulties.

Collaboration, based on the participants' experiences, is conducted through face-to-face interactions and assisted networks, both synchronously and asynchronously (Yuliyanti, 2016; Zaenab, 2021; Dini, 2022). This facilitates School counselors and parents in terms of time flexibility, cost flexibility, and ease of access (Uhriyah, Rosida, and Prasetya, 2023). School counselors do not require parents to come to the school. Collaboration can take place through home visits, having parents attend other school events such as report card distribution, and utilizing WhatsApp groups for communication about student development (Sari, 2017; Baluwa and Nadjamuddin, 2022; Dini, 2022).

*"There is a student addicted to vaping, but the parents have a strong commitment to helping their child break free from that addiction. Intensive communication, even if only through chat, has a positive impact on controlling the student's behavior at home and at school simultaneously." (Teacher 2)*

The absence of a specific program designed by the school for collaboration with students' parents does not mean the elimination of such activities. Based on a need analysis, collaboration is highly needed as it places School counselors and parents in roles to jointly identify student needs, accompany student growth and development, and play a role in helping to resolve student problems (Frederick et al., 2020; Kim & Lyons, 2003).

Based on the data collected from the participants, experiences in collaboration are summarized into three themes: positive experiences, negative experiences, and the greatest challenges they have faced when dealing with parents for collaboration. These three aspects

provide a general overview of the collaboration process in schools. Overall, the collaboration experiences of the participants are related to both academic and non-academic activities of students, both within and outside the school. This reinforces the view that cooperation between parents and School counselors is necessary because students spend all their time not only in school but also outside, exposing them to various conditions (Abdullah, 2019).

Several positive experiences can be summarized as follows: the emergence of student problems provides School counselors with opportunities to gain diverse experiences beyond the field of guidance and counseling, such as mediating with the police and serving as expert witnesses for criminal incidents at school. Positive collaboration experiences are also found when participants need to cooperate with other experts related to the field of guidance and counseling, such as School counselors from other schools, psychologists, and doctors (Purwaningrum, 2020; Ramdani et al., 2020). Based on these experiences, the most supportive factor for collaborating with parents is when parents trust School counselors, are willing to take an active role in the service, and refrain from giving negative judgments to School counselors and the school (Solina, 2017) these conditions, School counselors find it easier to share roles and determine the follow-up at each phase of the collaboration. To achieve this condition, School counselors need to have adequate competencies such as communication competence, the ability to convince parents, and collaboration-building strategies (Azzahrah, 2022; Taufik, 2018).

The negative experiences conveyed by the participants primarily revolve around situations where many parents place excessive trust in their children, making it difficult to trust School counselors. Instead of trust, parents tend to view School counselors negatively. Some parents deny the 'problematic' conditions experienced by their children, making it challenging for School counselors to take appropriate actions (Anis et al., 2021). Additionally, experiences mention that when parents give up on their children's conditions, collaboration becomes difficult. This may arise due to a lack of socialization about the need for parental collaboration with teachers, leading parents to have a narrow view of education and guidance and counseling (Birhan et al., 2021; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020). School counselors' experiences in dealing with parents also need attention so that negative aspects can be minimized (Kasmawati, 2020).

The challenges faced by School counselors when collaborating with parents almost all relate to personal conditions. Some challenges include the need for School counselors to be prepared to deal with various parental characters (Brown, 2020; Karaman et al., 2021), difficulty dealing with parents who lack trust in the school and School counselors (Pincus et al., 2020) difficulty dealing with parents who have misconceptions about the school and School counselors (giving up on the condition and preferring to leave it to the school as the primary responsible) (Santoso et al., 2020; Setiyowati et al., 2019; Zahro & Navisa, 2022), the occasional lack of agreement on time (Fatmawati, 2020; Al Qodri and Faisal, 2022), and the absence of treatment agreements between parents and school counselors due to various factors (Singh et al., 2020). These challenges arise because the culture built by each family varies, as does the school culture. Participants need to adapt to these conditions so that the existing challenges can be effectively addressed.

Positive experiences, negative experiences, and challenges will always be present in every collaboration process between school counselors and parents. With increasing experience in collaborative activities, School counselors will become more aware of their own conditions, enabling them to better prepare for collaboration (Riskiyah, 2017). They develop increased mental readiness and emotional maturity, allowing for greater stability in the collaboration process. Enhanced communication, cooperation, and problem-solving skills can be prerequisites for the success of collaboration with parents (Nguyen et al., 2020).

The collaboration process conducted in various conditions holds particular significance for school counselors. Drawing meaning from the experiences in their respective schools, the interpretation of collaboration activities varies. However, it can be specified into two themes: the meaning in terms of professionalism as a school counselor and the meaning as an individual.

From a professional perspective, it can be concluded that the participants interpret collaboration activities as a form of cooperation between the school and the family. This is considering that students play roles not only as school students but also as children, siblings, perhaps grandchildren, and other roles within the family. Students also have roles as members of the broader community whose lives are not confined to the school (Hermino & Arifin, 2020). This necessitates sufficient cooperation between the school and other entities outside the school. If done responsibly, it will contribute to the positive development of students, both as school members and community members (McIntosh & Curry, 2020; Robinson et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2022).

Collaboration makes school counselors not the sole advocates for student development. School counselors operate within the school environment, with parental support when students are at home. In principle, effective collaboration, aligned with the expertise and conditions of each party, facilitates goal achievement, as it is not solely dependent on one party (Cook et al., 2019; Hines et al., 2019). The shortcomings of parents are complemented by the role of School counselors in schools, and vice versa. Collaboration cultivates awareness as students undergo education; parents must also prepare themselves to continue learning, adapt, encounter problems, and seek solutions to these issues (Riza, 2022).

From a personal development perspective, collaboration provides School counselors with experiences to adapt to the conditions of students and the needs of the school (Firdausi & Purwaningrum, 2022). School counselors become acquainted with various problems faced by students and their resolution efforts. They strive to view student issues from various perspectives to minimize unfounded assessments. School counselors acknowledge that it is impossible to tackle student developmental challenges alone due to limitations in time, energy, and skills. They learn various approaches to address diverse student issues, enhancing skills in problem recognition, problem-solving, and risk analysis. In these varied conditions, School counselors learn to be individuals who continually grow, reflect, and improve service delivery (Bell et al., 2020).

In reality, the collaboration between School counselors and parents is not only beneficial for students and parents but also advantageous for School counselors. School counselors are recognized as professional helpers who continue to grow personally through various activities in the assistance-giving process (Firdausi & Purwaningrum, 2022). The actions taken by School counselors in preventing and resolving problems have positive impacts on their personal and professional lives (Fauza et al., 2022; Pincus et al., 2020; Savitri & Purwaningrum, 2023).

Overall, all participants state that personal competencies that can be enhanced through collaboration include communication skills (Kasmawati, 2020). Communication is a crucial skill for every School counselor when engaging in collaboration. It begins with efforts to analyze collaboration needs based on school requirements, combining them with parental needs, conveying information about collaboration needs, and executing collaboration, evaluation, and follow-up (Ramdani et al., 2020). With effective communication, School counselors can serve as a bridge between families and schools (Griffen, 2019). Supportive communication for collaborative activities can take the form of both oral and written communication.

Another competency that can be enhanced through collaboration is the ability to build relationships and cooperate with various parties, with a focus on collaboration with parents in this research (Gerdes et al., 2022; Juliawan et al., 2020; Vuorinen, 2021). School counselors

and parents are expected to have responsibilities according to their roles and strive for the positive development of students in their lives (Paolini, 2019; Purwaningrum et al., 2019). School counselors and parents both understand that they have equal roles within different scopes. In this situation, School counselors can also comprehend that they cannot work alone without the involvement of parents (Juliawan et al., 2020). The mutual need between School counselors and parents positions them in their respective roles.

Personally, the numerous preventive and curative collaboration agendas conducted by School counselors contribute to their personal growth, providing them with broad insights, substantial experiences, a willingness to view everything positively, increased sensitivity, and continually evolving problem-solving skills. These conditions are necessary for professional helpers to carry out their tasks and functions more effectively over time. This is because being a School counselor requires not only hard skills but also soft skills developed through experiences (Gusman, 2022; Juliawan et al., 2020; Purwaningrum et al., 2023).

Personal qualities are essential for School counselors in their efforts to provide assistance to students and facilitate parents (Karaman et al., 2021; Wardhani et al., 2019). Personal qualities can be enhanced by gaining more experiences and self-reflection on each experience. Collaboration becomes one of the strategies that can build the personal qualities of School counselors, enabling them to develop into positive and prosperous helpers (Fauza et al., 2022; Purwaningrum, 2020; Savitri & Purwaningrum, 2023).

## **Conclusions and Suggestions**

Collaboration between School counselors and parents is not systematically scheduled across all schools where the participants serve. The lack of understanding within schools about the importance of collaboration programs, insufficient communication between School counselors and the school administration, and inadequate school management contribute to the absence of such programs. Despite this, all School counselors have allocated time and effort to collaborate with parents. Although collaboration should ideally encompass both preventive and curative efforts, not all schools implement both approaches. Some School counselors engage in collaboration primarily as a curative measure. Challenges such as difficulty in meeting parents, misconceptions among parents about education, and constraints in resources, time, and finances contribute to this situation.

Collaboration is a strategy that, if executed effectively, benefits not only students as the primary participants of education but also parents and School counselors as service providers. The numerous interactions and collaborations between School counselors and parents allow both parties to grow, understand each other, and continually strive for improvement in the development of students. However, not all collaborations are successful, with various causes for failures. \_

In future research, it is recommended to instill basic skills needed by prospective School counselors for collaboration, such as communication, cooperation, and other interpersonal skills. Developing platforms that enable parents to collaborate with School counselors for both preventive and curative activities, not only through face-to-face meetings but also utilizing networks, is essential given the constraints on meeting in person. Furthermore, it is also necessary to conduct in-service training for School counselors to enhance collaboration skills. If these efforts are continuous, they can lead to the establishment of a robust collaborative system that supports educational programs more broadly.

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