The Use of Proverbs as a Metaphor in Solution-Focused Brief Counseling: A Preliminary Study and Framework for School Counselors

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Abstract

Abstract. This article is a preliminary study that aims to provide a theoretical review of the use of proverbs as a metaphor in solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) approach, and to provide a framework for school counselors. The method used is a narrative literature review of several main themes; proverbs in counseling, the concept of metaphor, and the SFBC approach. The findings of this study indicate that in the last 10 years, the number of articles related to the topic of proverbs in counseling is still very small. Another finding theoretically is that the proverbs is a form of metaphor because both are cultural products so that they can be used in counseling. In addition, there is a lot of relevance between metaphor and SFBC, when viewed from the philosophical foundations aspects, orientation or purpose of counseling aspects, counseling techniques aspects, and therapeutic communication aspects. Thus, the proverbs can be used in the SFBC approach through the technique of metaphor. We recommend a framework for counselors from certain communities or cultures to be able to adopt their proverbs and work with the SFBC approach.

Keywords: Counseling, Metaphor, Proverbs, School Counselor, SFBC.

Introduction

A proverbs is the wisdom of a society, which contains elements of advice, reflects cultural values, and provides lessons and instructions to individuals on how to live and action (Wołońciej, 2018). Proverbs are also one of the cultural products that play an important role in creating meaning for the understanding, insight, feelings and behavior of individuals in a community (Disassa & Into, 2020). Proverbs can also be a window to better understand what drives people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Owu-Ewie, 2019). In counseling, proverbs can be used as a means to teach the values of goodness in a culture and facilitate change for others who listen to them. To integrate proverbs into the counseling process, we need a technique that can be used as a vehicle to convey proverbs to clients. The counseling technique we mean is the metaphorical technique.

Metaphors in counseling are not new, because metaphors are communication tools that are used almost all the time by counselors and clients. From the philosophical aspect of counseling and therapy, the use of metaphors is motivated by the views of constructivism and social constructionism which see the central role of humans in the use of language, narratives, and stories in creating personal and reality of life (Mcleod, 2013; Meyer & Cottone, 2013; Tay, 2014). Metaphor is also a tool that helps the counselor to appreciate, understand, and reflect on the client's conceptual system (Ahammed, 2010; Tay, 2014; Wagener, 2017). In counseling, research shows that metaphor is an effective communication technique for counselors to bring about conditions of change and development for clients

(Ciuffardi et al., 2013; Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Komasi et al., 2017; Mashar & Nurihsan, 2017; Rahman, 2015; Robert & Kelly, 2010; Rahill et al., 2011; Shoushtari, 2015).

Therefore, the use of proverbs in counseling actually reflects something that should be raised and re-implemented because it is the basic values for the system of social relations. The proverbs expressions are not only symbols and narratives but also bearers of certain values and norms. When viewed from the perspective of school counseling, the proverbs is a form of metaphor that can be used by counselors as a therapeutic communication tool to convey the importance of positive thinking and acting to students in their lives. However, to integrate the proverbs in the current counseling approach, a preliminary study is needed that reviews theoretically based on the results of previous literature reviews.

This article is a preliminary study that aims to update knowledge and theoretical counseling practices regarding the use of local wisdom values such as the proverbs into current counseling, namely the solution-focused brief counseling (SFBC) approach. In addition, this article also recommends a conceptual framework (examples of application) for school counselors to integrate proverbs into the SFBC approach through the technique of metaphor. Thus, the focus of this article is: (1) how many articles in the last 10 years discuss the use of proverbs in counseling?; (2) what is the concept and form of metaphor in counseling? (3) how is the metaphor related to the SFBC approach? (4) how to integrate the proverbs in the SFBC approach?.

METHOD

Procedures

The method used in this study is a narrative literature review (Cronin et al., 2008). The procedures carried out in the narrative literature review are based on a five-step process namely; (1) selecting a review topic, (2) searching for literature related to the topic being review, (3) collecting, reading and analyzing literature, (4) writing the review, (5) references. The process of narrative literature review in this study can be seen in figure 1.1.

Data Sources and Inclusion Criteria

The data in this study were sourced from literature searches in online database. The search technique is by using keywords in two databases. The main database searches are Google Scholar and Springer Link as specific databases. The period of time in the literature search is a maximum of the last 10 years (2010-2020). We also use several literature books published before 2010, with theoretical basis reasons. After the data is
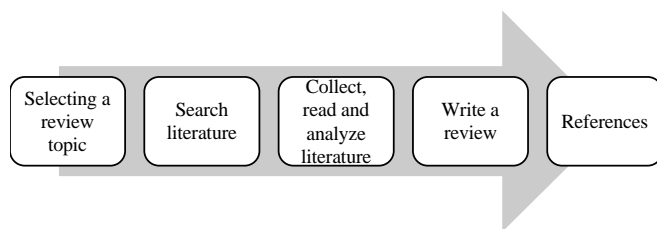
found, the next step is to carry out an initial classification and grouping of articles by type and source, by providing article boundaries. The limitations we mean are (1) the main data sources, namely the original reports of empirical research; (2) conceptual/theoretical review, namely papers relating to the description or analysis of theories/concepts related to the topic of the review (Cronin et al., 2008). After determining the data source, the next step is to carry out inclusion criteria which aims to get more in-depth information on articles that are considered relevant to the focus or purpose of the review. The inclusion criteria used in this process can be seen in the table 1.

RESULTS

Literature findings

Based on Google Schoolar and Springer Link search results using keywords; proverbs in counseling, metaphors in counseling, and solution-focused brief counseling, researchers found 530 articles. However, after the initial classification and grouping of articles by type and source, only 120 articles were produced. From these results, then screening was carried out based on the inclusion criteria and produced as many as 32 articles that met the inclusion criteria. In addition to articles, we also use 6 books as additional literature as a theoretical basis in this review. For more details can be seen in the following table 2:

The data in table 2. shows that there are 10 or 31% articles related to the topic of proverbs in counseling. Of the 10 articles, 8 articles are reports of empirical research results; 6 in English and 2 articles in Indonesian. In addition, there are 2 articles as a result of conceptual/theoretical reviews. While the articles

Fig. 1: The steps of the narrative literature review process (Cronin et al., 2008)

Table 1: Article inclusion criteria

Empirical research report	Conceptual/theoretical review
Title Relevance	Title Relevance
English and Indonesian	English and Indonesian
Author and year:	Author and year:
Journal (complete reference):	Journal (complete reference):
Research purposes:	Purpose of the paper:
Research methods:	Credibility:
Research findings:	Coherence:
Recommendation:	Recommendation:

Table 2: Literature findings

Main Content	Initial search	Classification of Data Types and Sources	Meets Inclusion Criteria	Percentage
Proverbs in counseling	115	35	10	31 %
Metaphors in counseling	235	60	15	47%
Solution-focused brief counseling	180	25	7	22%
Total	530	120	32	100%

related to the topic of metaphor in counseling were 15 or 47%. Based on this number, 9 articles are reports of empirical research results; 7 in English and 2 articles in Indonesian. The remaining 6 articles are conceptual reviews. Then for data on literature findings on the topic of solution-focused brief counseling, 7 articles or 22% were produced, 3 articles were reports on empirical research results and 4 articles were conceptual/theoretical reviews. We also use 4 books as additional literature in our theoretical review of the SFBC approach.

Regarding the difference in the amount of literature, it is because the focus of this article is the use of proverbs, so we emphasize more on how large the number of articles on the topic of proverbs in counseling are used as data sources. As for the fewer articles on the topic of SFBC, because we assume that the SFBC approach has been proven to have a very significant influence on the success of counseling in schools. Therefore, we only performed the inclusion criteria for articles reporting the results of studies on the overall effectiveness of SFBC.

Review Proverbs as a Metaphor in Counseling

In counseling, metaphor is a communication technique that is often used by counselors and clients. Metaphor is defined as a way or technique of communicating in one way expressed in another, where it provides cognitive information for individuals to understand the characters described so that they can drive new behavior (Kopp, 1995; Robert & Kelly, 2010).

Metaphors in counseling and therapy can be in the form of language symbols such as words, objects, pictures, stories, analogies, figures of speech, proverbs, aphorisms or wisdom, storylines, fairy tales, humor, poetry, or rituals (ceremonies), constructed to teach new concepts, help clients express themselves and encourage greater understanding, as they are not easily communicated in other ways (Ahammed, 2010; Zatloukal et al., 2019). In this review, we find that proverbs are a form of metaphor that can be used as a vehicle for counselors to facilitate understanding, development and therapeutic change for clients. All these metaphors can come from the client or from the counselor during the counseling process (Clarke, 2016; Wagener, 2017; Zatloukal et al., 2019).

However, the focus of this article is on metaphors that come from counselors, namely counselors using proverbs that are appropriate to the client's problem and conveyed verbally or non-verbally as a process for solutions, futures, and results to be achieved. It is very important for counselors to know the sources of metaphors that serve as the basis for therapeutic change during the counseling process. This is done in order to have an impact on clients who are constantly learning to gain new insight, understanding, new feelings and behaviors (Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; creativeWagener, 2017).

In relation to the topic of metaphors in counseling, we found 5 conceptual review literatures that explain theoretically about the use of metaphors in counseling as a therapeutic change technique (Ahammed, 2010; Genuchi et al., 2016; Tay, 2012; Tay, 2014; Wagener, 2017; Zatloukal et al., 2019). In addition, we also find 8 empirical research literature as evidence that the use of metaphorical techniques has an important role for counselors and is effective in changing clients' thoughts, emotions and behavior (Ciuffardi et al., 2013; Gelo & Mergenthaler, 2012; Komasi et al., 2017; Mashar & Nurihsan, 2017; Rahman, 2015; Robert & Kelly, 2010; Rahill et al., 2011; Shoushtari, 2015). Based on the results of the analysis of the literature, we summarize the metaphor technique into four steps; (1) planning metaphors, (2) delivering metaphors, (3) exploring meanings and new insights, (4) actualizing the benefits of metaphors in real life. Conceptually, the steps metaphor technique can be seen in the figure 1:

Review the SFBC concept

Solution-focused Brief Counseling (SFBC) or also called as Solution-focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) was pioneered by Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg in 1978 (Corey, 2016; Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016). The two figures were executive directors and senior researchers at the non-profit institution called as the Brief Family Therapy Center in United States (Corey, 2016). Philosophically, the SFBC approach is based on the view of social constructionism that in essence, truth and reality are not absolute, but both (truth and reality) can be constructed (Cottone, 2012; Meyer & Cottone, 2013).
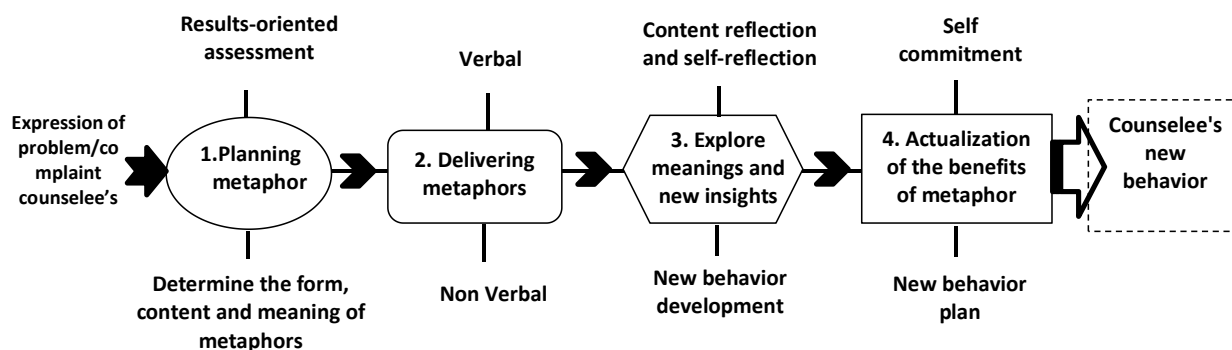

Fig. 1: Steps of the metaphor technique. Source: Author

The view of social constructionism also states that basically all knowledge is relative because it is always determined by the construct, theory, language, or culture can be apply to one particular phenomenon (Cottone, 2012). Social constructionism is also one of the theoretical pillars of the postmodern approach that emphasizes a therapeutic perspective (Cottone, 2012; Xu, 2010). Postmodernism is an effective means in counseling practice, to empower client strength, build egalitarian relationships between counselor and client, and can help clients to reconstruct the empowering narratives and deconstruct negative narratives (Xu, 2010).

Postmodern thought considers language and its use to create meaning in stories told by individuals (Corey, 2016; Xu, 2010). Therefore, social constructionism has a primary concern, namely to understand how people give meaning to life events and interpret the world around them and social reality (Xu, 2010). As a postmodern based approach, SFBC puts forward the empowerment of clients to find solutions so that the client can choose his own goals to be achieved (Corey, 2016). In addition, SFBC has assumptions that humans are healthy, capable (competent), have the capacity to build, design or construct solutions, so that the individual does not continue to dwell on the problem being faced (de Shazer & Dolan, 2007). Humans do not need to be fixated on problems, but they are more focused on solutions, act positively and realize the solutions they wants (Corey, 2016; de Shazer & Dolan, 2007).

Until now, SFBC is one of the promising and effective approaches to the provision of community services and specifically to students in school environment (Kim et al., 2017). Gingerich & Peterson (2013) reported that there were 74% of 43 studies that stated SFBC was an effective or healing approach that had a positive impact. In school settings, SFBC also provides many benefits to counselors who want a practical approach and time efficiency in the process of intervention with students (Corey, 2016; Kim et al., 2017). Many things are offered by the SFBC approach to school counselors to help students get out of their various problems, for example; behavioral and emotional problems, or reduce negative prejudice, academic problems, social skills, prevention of school dropouts and drug use (Kim et al., 2017). In addition to the school, SFBC has also been applied in some special populations or a particular culture as described by (Ciuffardi et al., 2013; Gong & Hsu, 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Meyer & Cottone, 2013).

DISCUSSION

The overarching aim of this preliminary study is to update theoretical and practical knowledge of the use of proverbs into current counseling approaches. To achieve this goal, there are four main themes in the discussion of this article; discussion of the findings of articles in the last 10 years discussing the use of proverbs in counseling, discussion of the results of theoretical reviews of metaphors in counseling, discussion of the results of studies of metaphorical relationships with the SFBC approach, discussion of the framework for using proverbs in the SFBC approach. These themes are described in the following discussion.

First, the results of a literature review of the number of articles provide an illustration that in the last 10 years the literature discussing the use of proverbs in counseling only 10 articles. A total of 8 articles are reports of empirical research results; 6 in English and 2 articles in Indonesian. Meanwhile, 2 articles are the result of conceptual/theoretical offers. When viewed in detail based on the criteria for the year of publication, the highest number was between 2017-2020, namely 7 articles. While the other 3 articles were published in 2011-2013. These results indicate that in the last 10 years, the number of publications that meet the inclusion criteria is very small.

In addition, the results of the content analysis of 8 empirical research articles describe that in terms of research objectives, most of the articles look at the role and influence of proverbs in the counseling process. The research methods used are mostly qualitative studies. In terms of research findings, most researchers reported that the use of proverbs in the counseling process made a positive contribution to client change (Ariantini et al., 2019; Ciuffardi et al., 2013; Disassa & Into, 2020; Liu et al., 2012; McRobie & Agee, 2017; Owu-Ewie, 2019; Rahill et al., 2011; Zubaidah, 2019).Second, we find that proverbs and metaphors are two things that cannot be separated in the social reality of society because they are both cultural products. A proverbs in a psychosocial framework reflect the normative aspects of how people think and behave in social situations. A proverbs is a close, definite, essential expression that expresses a universal truth, social norm, or moral theme. The strength of using proverbs is that on the one hand they come from local culture, and on the other hand they express universal rules.

While the results of the content analysis of 2 conceptual/theoretical articles, illustrate that in terms of the purpose of the paper, both provide conceptual and strategic offers for counselors to use proverbs in the counseling process, especially for counselees from certain cultures. The results of the review found that the two articles provided recommendations for future research to include local wisdom such as the adage in the counseling process (Litam, 2020; Wołońciej, 2018). Based on the analysis of empirical research articles and conceptual articles, we find that in the last 10 years the number of articles on the use of proverbs in counseling is very small. Therefore, this article can be a contribution to the increasing number of literature or publications on the use of proverbs as metaphors in counseling. Another finding from the review of the articles above is that all researchers recommend including the proverbs in counseling especially for counselors who work with clients in certain communities or cultures.

Second, we find that proverbs and metaphors are two things that cannot be separated in the social reality of society because they are both cultural products. A proverbs in a psychosocial framework reflect the normative aspects of how people think and behave in social situations. A proverbs is a close, definite, essential expression that expresses a universal truth, social norm, or moral theme. The strength of using proverbs is that on the one hand they come from local culture, and on the other hand they express universal rules.

Meanwhile, metaphor serves as a vehicle for counselors in conveying proverbs during the counseling process and can have an impact on clients who are constantly learning new understandings, emotions and behaviors (Clarke, 2014; Wagener, 2017). In addition, metaphor is a means to transfer meaning to how clients can think, communicate, learn and is also a powerful and effective tool used in the SFBC approach (Clarke, 2014; Zatloukal et al., 2019). Metaphor is also an inseparable part of the paradigm of social constructionism which highlights the central role of humans in language, narrative, and stories in creating personal and social realities of people's lives (Mcleod, 2013; Tay, 2016). In our opinion, this is very much in line with the SFBC approach which is rooted in the paradigm of social constructionism.

Third, we find that the relationship between metaphor and the SFBC approach is fundamental. As the result of theoretical analysis, there is a lot of theoretical relevance between metaphor and SFBC. This relationship can be seen from several aspects, namely: (1) philosophical foundations aspects, metaphors and SFBC is a theoretical framework of social constructionism which views humans as social beings where personal identity is a cultural product, (2) orientation or counseling goals aspects, SFBC prioritizes the client's ability to find solutions. Metaphors also have a common orientation, namely providing encouragement to clients to have new insights, recognize their strengths and resources and provide solutions to solving their problems, (3) counseling techniques aspects, metaphor is one of the eclectic techniques. For this reason, it is very possible that the metaphor technique can be integrated in the SFBC approach, (4) therapeutic communication aspects, metaphor is a means of therapeutic communication between counselor and client through positive language meaning. The SFBC approach also has several therapeutic communication techniques as its main strength which implies a number of metaphorical elements, for example; miracle questions, scaling questions, the use of rituals and positive client stories and these techniques are the most basic forms of metaphorical concepts (Ciuffardi et al., 2013; Clarke, 2014; Zatloukal et al., 2019).

Finally, we find that the use of proverbs as a form of metaphor can be used in the SFBC approach. Because the proverbs contains the value of wisdom, truth, social norms, or moral messages that convey to clients about the importance of thinking and acting positively in people's social lives.

In counseling, proverbs are a means to restructure problems, convey suggestions, new concepts, good values and moral teachings that can contribute to new ideas or ways to solve problems. From the perspective of the SFBC approach, a proverbs is a form of metaphor that can be adopted and used as a window of better understanding to propel a client's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors into a better future or as a way to "build a solution".

Use of proverbs in SFBC through metaphor techniques

Application Example:

To integraration proverbs into the SFBC approach, school counselors can use the technique of metaphor. In this discussion, we recommend four steps of metaphor technique, (1) metaphor planning, (2) metaphor delivery, (3) exploration of meaning and new insight, and (4) actualization of the benefits of metaphor in real life. These four steps are integrated into the four stages of SFBC which include; establishing a therapeutic relationship, goal setting, solution development, termination. This SFBC stage is adapted from the counseling stage proposed by Corey, (2016). Here is a general framework for using proverbs in the SFBC approach through the metaphor technique:

1. *Stage of establishing a therapeutic relationship*

   At this stage, the counselor creates facilitative conditions so that it can provide comfort to the client in achieving the expected changes. The counselor provides the opportunity for the client's (students) to describe his/her problem briefly and specifically. The important thing the counselor does is listen carefully to what is expressed by the client. Questions that may be used by the counselor are:

   "How can I be useful to you?", or,

   "What do you want to achieve in this counseling session?"

   Through the therapeutic relationship coaching session and the disclosure of the client's problems, the counselor starts planning the form, content, and benefits of the "proverbs" that matches the client's problem. After listening to the complaints conveyed by the client (students), the *counselor begins to plan a metaphor* (proverbs) that will be conveyed to the client based on the problem presented. To move on to the next session, the counselor can suggest the first session's task formulation to clients so they can do something useful in building a solution.

2. *Goal setting stage*

   Activities carried out at this stage are counselors and client's (students) collaborating to set positive, specific and immediate goals. Questions that counselors might use are:

"What is the purpose derived from attendance at this counseling session?", or,

"What will be different in your life when your problem is solved?"

After listening to answers from clients about the goals to be achieved, the counselor conducts discussions and provides motivational encouragement for positive understanding. At this stage, the counselor also conducts a result-oriented assessment to be achieved so that it can determine the form, content and benefits of metaphors (proverbs) that are in accordance with the goals that have been expressed by the client. The counselor can analyze the goals that have been formulated and adapted to the proverbs that will be adopted to be conveyed at the solution development stage.

3. Solution development stage

Apart from the goal setting stage, solution development is also one of the core stages of SFBC. The main strength of the two stages is the submission of exception-based questions or solution questions that lead to future achievements. Based on the client's exposure in the previous stage, at this stage, the counselor will lead the process of *delivering metaphors* (proverbs).

At this stage, the counselor can do this in several meetings, this aims to motivate the client to be able to develop solutions that are more positive and different than before. Before conveying the proverbs, the counselor should start with a *discussion* or *small talk* that leads to the presentation of a proverbs. In its implementation, the counselor can use sentences that frame the metaphorical offer as something that the client will think about, for example:

"When I listened to your explanation, a proverbs crossed my mind" ....or,

"From your explanation, it reminds me of a proverbs which reads".........

After the counselor conveys the proverbs, the next activity is the counselor bringing the client into the process of exploring the meaning of the proverbs and discovering new insights. With regard to metaphorical techniques, we state that the exploration and insight are the key in the process of using a metaphor (proverbs). Through a process of exploration and insight, the counselor invites the client to do "content reflection" and "self-reflection" related to the metaphor offered. At the time of content reflection and self-reflection, questions that can be used by the counselor, for example;

"After listening to the proverbs that I say, what do you think about the meaning of the proverbs?", or

"What message is contained in the proverbs?", or

"What is different from your mind after listening to the proverbs I said earlier?",

"After listening to the proverbs conveyed, imagine if you were in a situation or condition as in the meaning of the proverbs, what would you do?".

Through content reflection and self-reflection activities, the client is expected to identify the meaning and moral message of the content of the proverbs with its internal state. This allows the client to have a new understanding and awareness so as to lead to a choice of actions in a positive direction for the achievement of a solution. Furthermore, the activities carried out by the counselor at this stage are the process of developing solutions that lead to new positive behaviors. Some questions that lead to solutions, for example:

"What will you do, when you are in a situation that makes you feel comfortable?".

"So instead when you feel like you don't have a problem, what are you going to do?"

"Tell me about your experience, when you felt good or were in a pleasant situation, when you had problems with other people? (positive experience)".

Apart from the questions above, in this process, the counselor can also use other techniques in the SFBC approach, for example; miracle question, exception question or scaling question.

4. Termination stage

At this final stage, the counselor offers feedback from the client and provides encouragement to alternative solutions that have been submitted by the client. In the technique of metaphor, it can be referred to as a process to *actualization the benefits of proverbs in real life*. At this stage the counselor helps the client to develop himself in real life. In addition, counselors also suggest what they may have observed or done in previous sessions and will continue in the future. What counselors can do is encourage clients to do something different than before in their real life. The counselor might say:

"Pay close attention to what (positive) changes are happening in you, compared to when you are having problems?"

Through the formulation of the first session of assignments or homework that has been given, it can help clients to carry their learning outside the counseling session or in daily life. In other words, this process helps clients note differences when things are better, especially what is different about the way they think, feel, or behavior.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this preliminary study describe that in the last 10 years, the number of articles related to the topic of proverbs in

counseling is still very small. In addition, proverbs and metaphors are two things that cannot be separated because they are both products of local culture and embedded in the social reality of society. Metaphors techniques can serve as vehicles for counselors to use proverbs in the SFBC approach. Because metaphor and SFBC are an inseparable part of the paradigm of social constructionism. There are many links between the two, when viewed from the philosophical aspects, the change orientation aspects, use of techniques aspects, and therapeutic communication aspects. Thus, the results of this preliminary study indicate that the findings of previous research and conceptual/toritical reviews, proverbs can be used in the stages of the SFBC approach through metaphorical techniques. Therefore, we recommend a framework for school counselors from certain communities or cultures to adopt their proverbs and work with the SFBC approach, either individually or as a group process.

Research Implication

Efforts to use proverbs as a form of metaphor in the SFBC approach, are not only limited to theoretical reviews or framework recommendations, but further research needs to be done on the implementation process. This is intended to provide empirical evidence on the implementation of professional and effective counseling. The results of this study provide a scientifically proven practical framework for counselors who use proverbs and work with clients. For future research, a quantitative approach can be used with experimental designs or other designs. We also recommend that in the intervention procedure, counselors can carry out individual counseling or group counseling based on the procedures and stages in the SFBC approach. Future research findings are expected to provide a reference for counselors in carrying out the counseling process in scientific ways, so that the use of proverbs in the counseling process has a strong therapeutic power. It is very important for counselors who work with clients from certain cultures, it is necessary to increase multicultural understanding and competence.

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