The Effect of Guidance and Counseling Programs on the Learning Processes of Visually Impaired High School Students

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Abstract

Guidance and counseling programs aim to lead and guide students by assisting them to achieve developmental tasks. This study investigated the role and effect of a guidance and counseling program on the learning processes of visually impaired students in an inclusive educational setting. The study also investigated the implementation of the principles and services of the program for such students. The respondents were visually impaired students and their teachers and counselors. The study was conducted at several senior high schools providing inclusive education in Bandung and the surrounding areas. In line with the characteristics of the investigated challenges, this study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The results of this study showed various problems in the learning processes of visually impaired students. To solve these problems, both teachers and counselors...
provided guidance and counseling to help students in their learning process. The programs also encouraged students to enter university by helping them develop self-confidence.

Keywords: guidance and counseling, blind students, inclusive education

Introduction

Man’s desire to improve his knowledge is a need reflecting social development in developed societies, which requires continuous changes, adjustment, and improvement in education. This is also true for the case of Indonesia. Although it is one of the fundamental rights of all men to get sufficient education, in many countries there are 50-60% of children without disabilities; and only 2-3% of children with disabilities attend schools (Johnsen & Skjørten, 2001: 37).

In Indonesia, the official data from Direktorat PSLB (the Directorate of Special School Education) in 2007 reported that of all population of children with disabilities (318,600 children), only 24.7% (78,689 children) attend formal education (Direktorat PLSB, 2008). This implies that there are 65.3% of children with disabilities who are excluded, marginalized, and do not receive an access to their rights of education. This number could be even larger, considering the small prevalence rate used (0.7% of total population) and the low quality of data collection system in the country.

Responding to this situation, on 7 to 10 June 1994, more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations held a meeting in Salamanca, Spain, to expand the objectives of Education for All (EFA) by considering a shift in fundamental policies necessary for promoting inclusive education approach, so that schools can serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs. The Salamanca Statement, focuses on six points: (1) the rights of all children, particularly those with temporary and/or permanent disabilities, to receive educational adjustment so that they can attend school, (2) the rights of all children to attend inclusive classes at schools in their home environment, (3) the rights of all children to participate in a student-centered learning that meets individual needs, (4) enrichment and benefits for all participating parties will be realized through inclusive education, (5) the rights of all children to participate in meaningful and quality education, and (6) the belief that inclusive education will lead to an inclusive society and to cost-effectiveness.

Concern for the equity and development of quality education through an inclusive education system is expected to accommodate society’s educational needs, including for children with permanent disability of visual impairment (blindness). Considering the particular disability of visually-impaired students, empirical data show that inclusive education system existing in Indonesia nowadays is attended by many visually-impaired students.

Historically, inclusive education in Indonesia began as an integrated education for visually-impaired students in 1978. Up to now, there have been a great amount of visually-impaired students who academically succeed in their education at public schools. Conceptually, several arguments can be presented to support the prospect of visually-impaired students to get education in inclusive schools. First, academically, visual impairment (handicap) does not significantly hinder academic accessibility of visually-impaired students to enroll in public schools. Hardman et al.
without visual-handicap. Any obstacle or difficulty lies in their cognitive function development. **Second**, in terms of social skills, visual impairment has no significant effect towards the social skills of visually-impaired students. To certain extent, they are relatively able to develop their social skills. **Third**, from the viewpoint of mobility, the physical setting of inclusive education provides ample opportunities for visually-impaired students to be mobile along with students without visual disabilities. This will allow for empowerment of basic skills in orientation and mobility.

From the description above, visually-impaired students’ participation in inclusive education is an implementation of Education for All (EFA), human right, and Salamanca Statement—as international agreement on the importance of inclusive education for children with special needs, including those with visual disabilities (impairment). Mega (2005: 89) found that the primary factors affecting the success or failure of visually-impaired students’ in inclusive education system are non-academic. The factors include the lack of motivation, misperception concerning surrounding environments, self-concept development on visually-impaired students, and lack of skills on the part of visually-impaired students to develop social interaction. In addition, field observation shows that educational intervention in inclusive school fails to accommodate the needs of visually-impaired students due to the lack of comprehension for the disability, including its philosophical, conceptual, and technical aspects.

The phenomenon discussed above clearly indicates a gap between the practice of education in public school and the principles of inclusive education, particularly in the development of guidance and counseling services. Considering this phenomenon, it is important to academically study the importance of guidance and counseling services in the context of visually-impaired students’ educational problem in inclusive education setting. Based on this framework, the main research problem in the present study is formulated as: “How is the implementation of guidance and counseling concepts in visually-impaired students’ learning at inclusive education institution?”

**Literature Review**

**Inclusive Education as an Education System**

Indonesia’s National Education Department, through Directorate of Special School Education (under Directorate General of Primary and Secondary Education) develops policies and programs of Special Education which accommodate inclusive education as follow: Inclusive education is an education that involves students with special needs (disabilities) to learn together with their peers in public school, which will lead to them being part of the school society, to create conducive learning atmosphere. Inclusive education needs to be realized in Indonesia, based on the belief that everyone has the same rights and obligations. The implementation of inclusive education concepts is also promoted by the convention that children with special needs have the same rights and dignity to achieve their potentials within society.

UNESCO (2005) defines inclusive education as “…a process intended to respond to students’ diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education”. It can be concluded that inclusive education accommodates three important points: (1) responding to students’ diversity, (2) improving students’ participation, and (3) reducing students’ isolation in and from education.
On 7 to 10 June 1994, more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations held a meeting in Salamanca, Spain, to expand the objectives of Education for All (EFA) by considering a shift in fundamental policies necessary for promoting inclusive education approach, so that schools can serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs.

In the Salamanca Statement, there are six points being focused on: (1) the rights of all children, particularly those with temporary and/or permanent disabilities, to receive educational adjustment so that they can attend school, (2) the rights of all children to attend inclusive classes at schools in their home environment, (3) the rights of all children to participate in a student-centered learning that meets individual needs, (4) enrichment and benefits for all participating parties will be realized through inclusive education, (5) the rights of all children to participate in meaningful and quality education, and (6) the belief that inclusive education will lead to an inclusive society and to cost-effectiveness.

In the final draft of Governmental Decree Bill, Chapter II Article 12 on Integrated and Inclusive Education, it is stated that: (1) integrated and inclusive education aims to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to receive integrated education through regular school systems so that their educational needs are met, (2) integrated and inclusive education can be implemented in primary schools, secondary schools, and higher education institutions, (3) the implementation of integrated and inclusive education may involve one or several types of students with disabilities, depending on the capability of the schools, (4) schools that implement integrated and inclusive education must provide special structures and facilities to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, (5) students enrolling in integrated and inclusive education have a right to receive special evaluation, based on their particular abilities and needs, (6) the government attempts to provide incentives for schools that implement integrated and inclusive education, and (7) the implementation of points (1) through (6) is under the regulation of Education Minister and/or Regional Government.

Pearpoint & Forest in Fern Aefsky (1995: 5), noted that: “some teachers believe that inclusion will eradicate labelling, privileged education, and privileged class; yet it will not abolish the support and services needed by the students in public school.” Finding of previous study shows that inclusive education foster the development of all children in various ways (Heston, M., 2004: 2).

**Visual Impairment**

Visually-impaired individuals are those with a combination of visual acuity of less than 0.3 (60/200) or those with a higher rate of other types of visual impairment, i.e. individuals who are unable or have significant difficulties to read texts or illustration even with the aid of magnifying lenses. The measurement of eyesight acuity is conducted using the international chart of eyesight test (Nakata, 2003).

**Characteristics of Children with Visual Impairment**

Lowenfeld (School, 1986: 24) states that children with visual impairment “… possess no characteristics specific to themselves as blind persons.”
Learning for Students’ with Visual Impairment

Stakes (Hornby, 2000: 23) outlines several strategies to be used in teaching students with visual impairment or disability: (1) find out from parents/specialists exactly what the child’s difficulties are; (2) encourage the child to use visual aids prescribed, e.g. glasses, magnifiers; (3) seat the child appropriately in the classroom, e.g. in the middle, towards the front; (4) make sure the lighting is suitable; eliminate glare from the desk and whiteboard; (5) use worksheets with correct print size, enlarged if necessary; (6) ensure good contrast on any visual materials used – black and white is best; (7) supplement visual information with verbal explanation; (8) use concrete materials and hands-on experiences wherever possible; (9) allow more time to complete tasks, and provide breaks to combat fatigue; (10) arrange for other children to act as buddies, and use peer tutoring; and (11) do not lower expectations because the students has visual impairment.

Meanwhile, Scholl, G.T. (1986: 461) describes several guidance and counseling competencies that teachers needs to master in working with visually-impaired students. The competencies are: knowledge of the strengths and needs of visually-impaired students during their education, knowledge of available services and supporting personnel for visually-impaired students, knowledge of methods to communicate guidance to supporting personnel, knowledge or professional ethics related to guidance information, knowledge of interview techniques, knowledge of visually-impaired students’ needs to develop positive self-concept, knowledge of the role of teachers in guidance and counseling of visually-impaired students, and knowledge of basic techniques of guidance and counseling.

Research Method

The present study employs a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. For quantitative data, the analysis technique used is descriptive statistics, in the form of percentage. This is in line with Sugiyono’s statement (2003) that “descriptive data analysis technique is performed through descriptive statistics, i.e. statistics measurement to analyze data by describing the collected data as it is, without any purpose of generalizing the findings. Descriptive statistics data analysis techniques include data display in tables, graphs, charts, percentage, frequency, and mean, median, or modus calculation.” This approach is the basis for the subsequent in-depth qualitative analysis.

To perform in-depth analysis of quantitative data, the qualitative approach is implemented. As described by Nasution (1982: 5), the core of qualitative study is the observation of individuals in their natural environment, observation of their interaction with environment, and understanding their language and interpretation of their surroundings.

The final result of analysis, combining the quantitative and qualitative analysis, formulates the primary data through questionnaire, interview, and observation. This provides many benefits, particularly in collecting data and information. In this case, the role of researcher is hidden from the subjects of the study, allowing him to obtain information optimally (Nasution, S., 1996: 64).
Findings
The Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Concepts for the Visually Impaired Students
The aspects discovered in the implementation of guidance and counseling concepts to visually-impaired students at inclusive education school consist of eleven principles: confidentiality, volunteerism, openness, activity, independence, contemporary, dynamic, integration, harmony, expertise, and transfer.

The Principle of Confidentiality
In implementing the principle of confidentiality, most teachers (68%) analyze various information concerning students with visual impairment. The purpose of this analysis is so that the teachers, at the very least, know the difficulties and needs of visually-impaired students in the actual learning activities in classroom. The gathered data is then selected, in which the majority of teachers (73%) segregate the confidential information of visually-impaired students. They believe that some information is very personal that other people must not know about. For instance, the information concerning the cause of visual impairment. Teacher needs to be aware of this information since it will affect students’ psychological condition in learning. Other people, however, should not be made privy to this information, considering that there is a risk that they will talk about it and negatively affect student’s psychological condition.

Many teachers (68%) not only separate but also select confidential information concerning visually-impaired students. Nearly all teacher (96%) keep the confidentiality of such information by not giving it to anyone. For the purpose of providing educational services needed by visually-impaired students, majority of teachers (82%) reveals confidential information concerning visually-impaired students in teacher meetings. Considering the need to provide appropriate education for visually-impaired students and their psychological state, most teachers (73%) pay close attention towards the confidentiality of visually-impaired students’ information.

The Principle of Volunteerism
In providing guidance and counseling services, most teachers (82%) base their practices on the principle of student’s willingness. Nearly all teachers (96%) do not force students to participate in guidance and counseling activities. However, considering the important role of guidance and counseling to support students’ success, for both visually-impaired students and students in general, majority of teachers (73%) get upset if a visually-impaired student is unwilling to participate in guidance and counseling activity. Since teachers (73% of them) implement guidance and counseling based on the principle of student’s willingness, most of them (68%) develops visually-impaired students’ willingness to get involved in guidance and counseling. Almost all teachers (91%) provide guidance and counseling services not due to pressure from other parties nor because coercion of others (91%). Nearly all teachers (91%) reveal that they organize guidance and counseling services solely to assist visually-impaired students.

The principle of Openness
In delivering lessons in classroom, nearly all teachers (96%) accept visually-impaired students as they are. Teachers believe that visually-impaired students are no different from sighted students in their classroom. Most teachers (77%) also do not turn away
visually-impaired students who are poorly dressed. Instead, they remind the students of the propriety in dressing. Majority of teachers (77%) also do not tell visually-impaired students to go home when they are upset. As teachers, they should be able to separate personal affairs and professional obligation in front of the students.

Nearly all teachers (91%) state that they are ready to provide guidance and counseling services anytime. Most of them (7%) do not feel annoyed should a visually-impaired student wishes to have guidance and counseling. In fact, majority of them (77%) immediately approach visually-impaired student wishing to have guidance and counseling services. Teachers also treat visually-impaired students proportionally. This is evident from the statement of most teachers (86%) that they do not prioritize visually-impaired students more than other students, nor do they prioritize the children of government officials or rich people. They view students not from the latter’s socio-economic status, but from the severity and urgency of the problems to be addressed. Majority of teachers (82%) treat visually-impaired students as they are, not because of their visual impairment or out of pity.

The Principle of Activity
In the implementation of guidance and counseling, most teachers (82%) facilitate visually-impaired students to participate actively in guidance and counseling. To encourage student’s active participation, most teachers (73%) create a condition which will motivate and attract visually-impaired students to be actively involved in guidance and counseling.

Teachers not only facilitate students to be actively involved in guidance and counseling, but also (73% of them) facilitate visually-impaired students to perform a series of guidance and counseling activities. For this purpose, teachers (68%) create an atmosphere which will encourage visually-impaired students to perform a series of guidance and counseling activities. Majority of teachers (82%) facilitate visually-impaired students to create an activity of guidance and counseling. To achieve that, 73% of teachers design the activities to empower visually impaired students.

The Principle of Independence
Most teachers (77%) facilitate visually-impaired students to enable them doing something without emotional support from others. This is necessary in order to develop creative and independent behaviors in visually-impaired students. In addition, most teachers (77%) also facilitate visually-impaired students to make decisions.

To enable visually-impaired students to be independent and risk-taking individuals, most teachers (73%) facilitate visually-impaired students to perform various activities that employ the principles of right-vs.-wrong or important-vs.-unimportant. To develop visually-impaired students to be more independent, majority of teachers (82%) facilitate them to be able to develop their own potentials. All of these are because majority of teachers (86%) believe in facilitating and enabling visually-impaired students to help themselves.

The Principle of Contemporary Conditions
Majority of teachers (86%), in providing guidance and counseling services, focus on the present situation of visually-impaired students’ life as the subject of their practice.
Concerning the problem they address, 91% teachers focus on present problems of visually-impaired students as the target of guidance and counseling.

However, this does not mean that students’ past problems are of no significance. Students’ situation in the past is the foundation to analyze their present condition. Most teachers (77%) study the past condition of visually-impaired students in its relation to present life or problems of the students. In anticipating the future, most teachers (77%) consider the future in its relation to the contemporary condition of visually-impaired students.

The Principle of Dynamism
Considering the substance of guidance and counseling services that develops dynamically, most teachers (73%) develop the substance of their services to be better in time. Most teachers (77%) employs a substance of guidance and counseling services based on the contemporary condition, which they develop from the substance they have learned in universities.

Majority of teachers (86%) improves the substance of their services in accordance with the advancement in guidance and counseling discipline. Nearly all teachers (96%) develop the substance of their services based on the current policies of guidance and counseling profession.

Pertaining to guidance and counseling services for visually-impaired students, most teachers (77%) develops the substance of their services in line with students’ needs. Majority of teachers (86%) improve the substance of guidance and counseling practice based on the developmental stage of visually-impaired students.

The Principle of Integration
Nearly all teachers (91%) state that the components of guidance and counseling program in their school complement each other. This indicates that the whole program is integrated in synergy to provide the best educational services for students, including those with visual impairment. The components of guidance and counseling program in most of the schools (86%) are one integrated whole.

The integration of educational services at schools is also found to be positive. Nearly all teachers (91%) argue that the components of guidance and counseling program in their school are interrelated with the components of other educational services. Not only they are interrelated and support each other, majority of teachers (86%) state that the components of guidance and counseling program are part of an integrated whole that is educational services.

The Principle of Harmony
Guidance and counseling services in the school work in harmony with other education services (86%). Not only harmonious, guidance and counseling services are also conducted in tandem with other educational services. It is evident from nearly all of teachers’ responses (91%).

Most teachers (68%) suggest that guidance and counseling services in their schools are enjoyed by visually-impaired students and other parties. In addition, majority of teachers (73%) state that guidance and counseling services are also enjoyed by other parties in the school. Visually-impaired students, and other parties inside and outside
The school, tend to like the guidance and counseling services because the program is designed to be integrative and harmonious with other educational services.

**The Principle of Expertise**

Nearly all teachers (91%) suggest that guidance and counseling services in their schools are delivered by competent personnel of guidance and counseling field. Guidance and counseling services are provided by those with minimum education of Bachelor degree in Guidance and Counseling, as stated by most teachers (86%).

Most teachers (86%) state that guidance and counseling services in their schools are delivered by educators with relevant and adequate background. In addition, most teachers (77%) also state that guidance and counseling services in their schools are provided by educational personnel with relevant and adequate educational background.

**The Principle of Transfer**

Most of the visually impaired students enrolled in the respondents’ schools are not transfer students. Therefore, only a few teachers (14%) state that they handle visually-impaired students transferred from other parties. Nearly all teachers (96%) state that they do not counsel transferred students with visual impairment.

In handling visually-impaired students who need special treatment, the teachers do not perform it by themselves. Teachers refer these students to other more competent parties. As stated by the teachers, in the case where teachers are unable to handle special cases of visually-impaired students, most of them (86%) transfer the students to experts with more relevant skills. For this purpose, nearly all teachers (96%) have recommended a transfer for certain visually-impaired students.

In implementing the concepts of guidance and counseling to visually-impaired students, teachers first analyze various information pertaining to the students. They also separate the confidential from non-confidential information. Teachers always try to suggest that visually-impaired students visit guidance and counseling teacher if the students have anything important to discuss or communicate.

In general, the concepts of guidance and counseling implemented in the learning of visually-impaired students in inclusive school, that directly involves the students, are confidentiality, openness, activity, independence, and integration. Visually-impaired students feel that they are respected and acknowledged by the teachers because they are allowed to be independent in completing tasks. In general, the students also feel safe and comfortable at schools due to the integrated implementation of guidance and counseling.

It is a good collaboration, as well as comprehensive understanding, of teachers if they see how guidance and counseling intervention needs to be performed by experts and how to transfer the case they face in their classroom.

**Conclusion**

The enrollment of visually-impaired students in the inclusive school is one real example of inclusive education implementation planned by Indonesian government. In learning at inclusive school, visually-impaired students face various problems and
difficulties. In learning and completing their tasks, visually-impaired students often face difficulties to fully understand teachers’ explanation; particularly when it involves visual aids. Accessibility of learning facilities and resources is also a problem for visually-impaired students in inclusive school. The skills of self-orientation and mobility are basic skills that visually-impaired individuals must possess. These two skills enable them to interact well with their environment, and to undergo social adjustment at inclusive school.

From teachers’ perspective, assessment is the first and foremost activity that needs to be done prior to delivering lessons or learning to visually-impaired students. Based on this assessment, teachers will fully understand the potentials, limitations, and learning needs of visually-impaired student. In some of the guidance and counseling concepts, teachers have implemented the result of such assessment. They believe that information concerning visually-impaired students is important and they are able to select and separate which information is confidential and which can be shared with others. They also accept visually-impaired students as they are; in fact, they even facilitate these students to participate actively in learning. Teachers believe that the involvement of visually-impaired students in various learning activities will develop the students’ self-concept and independence. Teachers believe that guidance and counseling services delivered to visually-impaired students are useful input for teachers to handle visually-impaired students in their classrooms. They understand that counseling should be handled by experts, and referral is one of the ways to transfer students that they cannot handle.

The implementation of guidance and counseling concepts in visually-impaired students’ learning in inclusive school provide positive contributions for visually-impaired students. The implementation of guidance and counseling principles in learning, students will feel safe, comfortable, motivated, and confident that they are able to perform many activities independently. This will develop a sense of motivation to be independent in shaping a better future for themselves.

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Ethics
We wish to declare that all the necessary academic procedures have been followed and there is no plagiarism of any kind within this paper.

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