

Research Article

Optimizing Counseling Programs in Higher Education and Their Future Implications

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Abstract

Guidance and Counseling (BK) programs in higher education have a strategic role in supporting student well-being, especially in the midst of academic, social, and emotional challenges. This study aims to evaluate the current condition of the BK program, identify the main obstacles, and formulate optimization strategies that are more targeted. A qualitative approach through literature study and document analysis was used to examine the effectiveness of counseling services in higher education. The results showed that counseling programs in higher education still face limitations, such as minimal budget, lack of professional counselors, and low accessibility of services. Recommended optimization strategies include the implementation of digital technology for online counseling, improving counselors' competencies through continuous training, a student needs-based approach through regular surveys, and collaboration between units in higher education to raise awareness of the importance of counseling services. The optimization of counseling programs has significant implications for students and educational institutions. Improved service quality can support students' mental well-being, improve their adaptability, and prepare them for the world of

work. For institutions, this optimization contributes to the reputation and attractiveness of the campus, while increasing student retention rates. This research confirms the importance of continued investment in counseling programs to create an academic environment that supports students' mental health and success.

Keywords: Guidance and Counseling, Higher Education, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

The Guidance and Counseling (BK) program in higher education has a strategic role in supporting student welfare, both in terms of academic, social, and emotional (Fathurahman et al., 2024; Suriyanti et al., 2024; Telaumbanua, 2024) . Students, as the next generation of the nation, are often faced with various pressures during their studies (Muid et al., 2024) . Academic pressures, such as assignment demands and expectations to excel, are one of the main causes of increased stress among students (IRAWADI, 2024; Mulya & Indrawati, 2016) . Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2022 revealed that around 30% of students in Indonesia experienced severe stress due to academic demands and difficulties in adjusting to the campus social environment. This figure shows how important the role of counseling services is in helping students manage the challenges they face.

The challenges faced by students do not stop at academic pressure (Febriyola et al., 2023) . Social adaptation is also a significant problem, especially for new students or those who come from remote areas (Lestari et al., 2021; Marandof & Sarajar, 2024) . New students have difficulty adapting to the campus social environment (Daulay, 2021; Estiane, 2015; Sandra et al., 2020) . The lack of social skills and the cultural distance between hometown and urban life often make students feel isolated. In addition, poor career planning is also a big problem. Many students feel unprepared to enter the world of work after graduation (Masril et al., 2021; Nurjanah, 2018; Uyun, 2023) , thus making the counseling program very relevant in helping students prepare for the future.

In this context, the optimization of counseling programs is an urgent need (Bhakti, 2015; Nurhasanah et al., 2024) . In the modern era, counseling programs must be able to adapt to technological developments and changes in social dynamics (Firman, 2012; Nasution et al., 2023) . For example, the use of digital platforms for counseling services can expand students' access to psychological and guidance assistance (Nasution, 2023) , especially for those with time or location constraints. A 2021 report from the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized that accessibility to mental health services is an important factor in improving individual well-being. The implementation of digital technology in counseling programs also allows universities to provide more flexible and efficient services.

However, the implementation of counseling programs in higher education is still faced with various obstacles. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of professional counselors. This condition has a direct impact on the low quality of counseling services received by students. This limitation requires serious attention so that the counseling program can be optimized according to the needs of

students. The optimization of counseling programs does not only depend on the provision of adequate resources, but also requires innovative and collaborative strategies.

The use of technology, such as online counseling applications, can be an effective solution to reach more students. In addition, improving counselors' competencies through continuous training is key to providing quality services. Collaboration between units in higher education, including faculties and student organizations, is also needed to promote counselling services more widely and effectively. With these strategic steps, counseling programs in higher education can transform into services that are more relevant, adaptive, and positively impact students in the present and future. The purpose of this study is to identify constraints in the implementation of the counseling program, analyze optimization strategies that can be implemented, and evaluate the implications of such optimization on student welfare and service effectiveness in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research used in this study is qualitative, focusing on literature studies, document analysis, and case studies from research articles and books. This method was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions and challenges faced by the BK program, as well as optimization strategies that can be applied (Firman, 2018). The literature study allowed researchers to review a variety of relevant and up-to-date references, thus providing a strong basis for analysis. Data collection was conducted through literature analysis involving various documents and cases from research articles, books, publications related to counseling programs in higher education. By analyzing these documents, the research was able to identify patterns, successes, and shortcomings that could be used for evaluation.

The analytical technique used in this study is thematic analysis, which aims to identify patterns and main themes that emerge from the documents and literature reviewed. This approach allows researchers to group information based on certain themes, such as the challenges of implementing counseling programs, optimization strategies, and their implications. The results of the analysis are expected to provide concrete and applicable recommendations for the development of counseling programs in higher education, as well as contribute to the literature related to guidance and counseling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature analysis that has been carried out, 38,000 articles were found discussing universities and their roles, but this study analyzed 7 articles with the keywords "society", "university", "role". And get some research articles analyzed as follows:

Table 1. Analysis Results

No.	Author and Year	Title	Analysis
1	(Putra, 2022)	Guidance and counseling in higher education in the era of	Reviewing the implementation of Guidance

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		society 5.0	and Counseling (BK) in higher education in the era of Society 5.0 with a literature study approach.
2	(Setiawan & Lenawati, 2020)	The role and strategy of universities in facing the era of Society 5.0	Analyzing the roles and strategies of universities facing the Society 5.0 era using the TOWS analysis method.
3	(Al-Fikri, 2021)	Opportunities and challenges for universities facing the digital revolution in the era of society 5.0	Identify opportunities and challenges for universities in the Society 5.0 era through in-depth interviews.
4	(Warsah, 2023)	The Urgency of Higher Education for Students in the Era of Society 5.0	Explore the role of higher education for students in the Society 5.0 era through national literature.
5	(Arsanti et al., 2021)	Demands for 21st century 4C competencies in higher education to face the era of society 5.0	Discussing the 4C competencies of the 21st century as a demand for university graduates in the era of Society 5.0.
6	(Toriyono et al., 2022)	The Urgency of Multicultural Education in Character Development in the Era of Society 5.0 in Higher Education	Explaining the importance of multicultural education for student character development in the era of Society 5.0.
7	(Aman et al., 2023)	The Role and Strategy of Higher Education in Forming Excellent Human Resources with Creativepreneurship Spirit in the Era of Society 5.0	Analyzing strategies to form superior and creative human resources in the era of Society 5.0 through literature and SWOT analysis.

Based on the analysis, it can be seen that there is an overview of the role of higher education in dealing with problems and in terms of showing the need for counselors in higher education, but what is found is that there are various limitations in its implementation, such as the limited number of professional counselors. This suggests that there is an urgent need to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of counseling services to be more responsive to students' needs. Given the existing conditions, it is important to conduct a thorough evaluation of the current counseling program. This evaluation can include an analysis of student satisfaction with the services provided, as well as the effectiveness of the various programs that have been implemented. The data obtained from this evaluation can be the basis for formulating optimization strategies that are more targeted.

Optimization Strategy

One strategy that can be implemented by universities to optimize counseling programs is the use of digital technology (Fahyuni et al., 2020; Permatasari et al., 2021). The implementation of online platforms for remote

counseling can be an effective solution to improve service accessibility. For example, some overseas universities have successfully implemented online counseling systems that allow students to access services anytime and anywhere. This can help students who have busy schedules or live far from the campus to still get the support they need. Improving the competence of counselors is also an important step in optimizing the counseling program. Continuous training for counselors will help them to stay up-to-date with the latest developments in the field of mental health and counseling. According to research conducted by the American Counseling Association, counselors who attend training and workshops regularly tend to be more effective in providing services to their clients (ACA, 2021). Therefore, colleges need to provide sufficient budget and time for counselor training.

A student needs-based approach should also be a focus in the development of counseling programs (Fahyuni et al., 2020; Permatasari et al., 2021). Conducting regular surveys to understand students' specific needs can assist counselors in designing more relevant and effective programs. For example, if surveys show that many students have difficulties in time management, training programs on time management can be designed to help them. With this approach, counseling programs can be more responsive to students' needs and have a more positive impact.

Collaboration between units in higher education is also very important to promote counseling services. Collaboration with faculty and student organizations can increase awareness and understanding of the importance of counselling services. For example, some colleges have held joint seminars and workshops between counselors and faculty to discuss mental health issues faced by students. Such initiatives not only increase the visibility of counseling services but also strengthen the support network for students.

Future Implications

Optimizing counseling programs in higher education has significant implications for students and institutions. For students, improving the quality of counseling services can contribute to their mental and emotional well-being. With better support, students will be better able to adapt to challenging academic environments and develop the skills needed to enter the workforce. A study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health showed that students who received counseling support tended to have better academic performance than those who did not (NIMH, 2022).

For institutions, optimizing the counseling program can improve the reputation and attractiveness of the campus. Universities that have a strong and effective counseling program will be better able to attract new students and retain existing students. Data from the Association of Indonesian Private Universities shows that institutions with good counseling programs have a higher student retention rate, reaching 85% compared to 70% in institutions that do not have a structured counseling program (APTISI, 2023). This shows that investment in

counseling programs is not only beneficial for students, but also for the sustainability of the institution itself.

The long-term implications of optimizing the counseling program also include increasing awareness of the importance of mental health among students. With better services in place, students will be more open to seeking help when they experience problems, thus reducing the stigma attached to mental health. This is in line with global trends that show that increased awareness of mental health can have a positive impact on individuals' quality of life.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that it is important for universities to not only consider the optimization of counseling programs as a temporary measure, but as part of a long-term strategy to support student well-being and improve the overall quality of education. Through a comprehensive and sustainable approach, the counseling program can be an important pillar in creating a healthy academic environment and supporting students' future development...

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