

Research Article

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Author for correspondence:

Siti Kasmila

 sitikasmila@gmail.com

 Affiliation (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia)



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Experiential Learning and Counselling Skill Development among Associate Counselors at Kampoong Hening

¹ Siti Kasmila , ² Dudy Imanuddin Effendi , ³ Bahrudin .

Abstract: The transfer of skills from training to practice remains an important issue in the development of community-based support providers, as acquiring training content does not necessarily lead to its effective application in real-world settings. This study aims to identify and explain the process of counselling skill development through experiential learning within the Sekolah Happy Counselor programme at Kampoong Hening. A qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected during 2025–2026 through direct interviews with one programme manager and two Associate Counselor alumni, supplemented by programme information documented in the research materials. The data were analysed thematically through the identification of meaning units, initial coding, category development, examination of relationships across categories, and theme construction. Three interrelated patterns were identified. First, learning progressed from structured skill acquisition to simulation, practice-based experience, and the processing of experience. Second, the documented alumni experiences indicated developments in counselling practice, including a shift from advice giving towards listening and exploratory questioning, alongside greater attention to initial assessment, session management, and professional boundaries. Third, the transfer of learning was perceived to be supported by mentoring, supervision, alumni networks, and opportunities for practice, while being constrained by case complexity, readiness to practise, time, and available resources. The study concludes that, within the Sekolah Happy Counselor case, counselling skill development is better understood as an ongoing experiential and supervised learning process rather than as a direct outcome of training content delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION

The availability of mental health professionals in Indonesia remains limited. Data from the Directorate General of Health Human Resources recorded 1,716 psychiatrists for a population of 287,198,383, representing a ratio of 0.006 per 1,000 population compared with a target of 0.20 per 1,000 population (Direktorat Jenderal SDM Kesehatan n.d.). This situation strengthens the relevance of community-based mental health support as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, professional services, particularly when community support providers receive appropriate training, ongoing support, and clear boundaries of practice (Susanti et al. 2024). Within this context, Kampoong Hening developed the Sekolah Happy Counselor programme to equip Associate Counselors from diverse professional backgrounds, including education, health care, human resources, and socio-religious activities. The programme combines character development, counselling skills training, simulation, practice-based experience, and post-training support.

However, participation in training does not in itself ensure that acquired skills can be applied consistently in practice. A review of soft-skills transfer indicates that behavioural change following training is influenced not only by instructional design but also by opportunities to apply skills, environmental support, and individual readiness (Weick 2025). Longitudinal research on training transfer similarly suggests that facilitating and constraining factors may change after participants return to their practice environments, indicating that transfer should be understood as a process that continues beyond the completion of training (Hanum et al. 2024). Accordingly, an important issue in counselling skills development programmes is not simply what is taught, but how learning experiences develop into practices that can be applied and adapted in real-world situations.

Research on skill development in counselling education and training highlights the importance of active, purposeful, and repeated practice. Anditasari et al. (2026) showed that competency development and experiential learning constitute important elements of innovation in counsellor education. McLeod (2022) found that counselling students used deliberate practice both within and beyond formal learning contexts to develop their skills, while Mahon (2023) demonstrated the potential value of deliberate practice in the acquisition of therapeutic skills. These studies underline the importance of practical activity in skill development, but they predominantly focus on skill acquisition during education or training itself.

Another body of research positions experience and reflection as the link between learning and counselling practice. Campbell and Babb (2023) showed that experiential learning occupies an important place in counsellor education because it enables learners to connect curriculum content with direct experience. Ting et al. (2022) found that demonstration, observation, participation, and feedback supported counselling learning experiences in an Asian context. Trottier (2024) further emphasised the importance of debriefing in enabling practice-based experiences to be reviewed reflectively, while Elliott et al. (2024) demonstrated that community-connected learning experiences can move counsellor learning from conceptual understanding towards application.

Beyond practice-based experience, supervision plays an important role in how skills are maintained and adapted. Chae and Backer (2024) highlighted the importance of learning communities, reflection, and application within counsellor supervision. Research on supervision practices also indicates that feedback, supervisory relationships, structure, and responsiveness to learners' needs are important components of practice-based learning (Aladağ and Kemer 2023). In community mental health settings, Pallikkuth et al. (2024) showed that peer supervision can support both performance and the working experiences of community mental health workers, while Susanti et al. (2024) identified the need for training, support, and capacity development among community mental health workers in Indonesia.

Taken together, the literature offers three complementary explanations: practice supports skill acquisition; experience and reflection connect learning with practice; and supervision supports the adaptation of skills after participants encounter real-world situations. However, the relationships among these processes are still often examined separately. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how structured training develops into changes in counselling practice, how practice-based experience and supervision relate to such development, and what conditions support or constrain the transfer of learning within community-based counselling skills development programmes.

Against this background, this study aims to identify and explain the process of counselling skill development through experiential learning within the Sekolah Happy Counselor programme. The analysis focuses on how structured training, simulation, and practice-based experience form part of the learning process; how these experiences relate to developments in counselling practice reported by Associate Counselors; and the conditions that support or constrain the application of skills in community settings. The study addresses two research questions: (1) how does the experiential learning process within Sekolah Happy Counselor relate to the development of counselling practice among Associate Counselors? and (2) what conditions support or constrain the transfer of learning experiences into community-based counselling practice? The study is guided by the analytical argument that counselling skill development is not a direct outcome of training content delivery, but rather an ongoing process linking experience, practice, the processing of experience, and supervisory support.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Experiential Learning in Counselling Skill Development

Experiential learning positions experience as a source of learning when it is reviewed, interpreted, and used to inform subsequent action. Kolb (1984) conceptualised this process through the relationship among concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Within the development of counsellor education literature, experiential learning is therefore understood not merely as participation in practical activities, but as an approach that connects learning content with learners' direct experiences (Campbell and Babb 2023).

In counselling training, experience acquires educational value when participants are given opportunities to practise skills and subsequently review how those skills were used. Trottier (2024) identifies debriefing as an important component of experiential learning because practice without reflective processing may limit the pedagogical value of the experience. Ting et al. (2022) likewise showed that observation, demonstration, direct participation, and feedback contribute to counselling learning experiences. In the Indonesian context, Rosyidi (2025) demonstrated the relevance of experience-based learning for developing basic counselling communication skills among students of Islamic Guidance and Counselling.

In this study, experiential learning is employed as an analytical lens rather than as a model assumed to operate fully and uniformly across all participants. The analysis examines direct experience through training and practice, opportunities for processing experience, adjustments in how counselling is conducted, and the subsequent application of skills where such processes are documented in the data. This distinction is important in order to avoid forcing the empirical material into a predetermined theoretical sequence when evidence for all stages is not available.

2.2 Counselling Skill Development

Counselling skills encompass the ability to use interpersonal responses and counselling techniques appropriately in order to establish relationships, understand clients' experiences, and manage the counselling process. Hunsmann et al. (2024) indicate that counselling skills may include exploration and understanding, action-oriented skills, and process management. Skill development therefore involves not only knowing a wider range of techniques, but also being able to select and use them appropriately within interaction.

Empirical studies indicate that practice contributes to the development of counselling skills that can be observed in applied settings. Dermawan et al. (2022) documented the use of a range of basic counselling skills by students during individual counselling sessions. Oktari et al. (2025) similarly showed that peer-counsellor training can develop knowledge of counselling microskills through learning activities involving instruction, practice, and role-play. These findings are consistent with McLeod (2022) and Mahon (2023), who position repeated and deliberate practice as an important component of skill development.

In this study, counselling skill development is defined more narrowly as documented and reported changes in counselling practice, particularly in relation to listening, questioning, initial assessment, professional boundaries, session management, and the organisation of the counselling process. The study does not assess formal clinical competence and does not use standardised measures to determine professional competency levels. Accordingly, the term skill development is not used to imply that all participants attained professional counsellor competence, but rather to describe changes in practice documented within the case.

2.3 Supervision and the Transfer of Learning into Practice

The transfer of learning refers to the use and adaptation of acquired skills when participants return to their practice environments. In the context of interpersonal skills, transfer is influenced by individual capability, opportunities to apply learning, motivation, and environmental support (Weick 2025). Hanum et al. (2024) further showed that factors affecting transfer may change over time after training, suggesting that training outcomes cannot be adequately understood solely by examining participants at the point when formal learning activities conclude.

Supervision provides a space in which practitioners can review their practice, receive feedback, and adapt skills to the demands of counselling situations. Chae and Backer (2024) highlighted the importance of learning communities and reflection within counsellor supervision. Aladağ and Kemer (2023) found that supervisory structure, techniques, feedback, relationships, and the role of the supervisor are important elements of counselling practicum supervision. Borders et al. (2023) likewise demonstrated that effective supervision requires a structured educational approach rather than functioning merely as an administrative process. In the Indonesian context, this issue remains particularly relevant because counselling supervision continues to face implementation challenges (Nurismawan, Purwoko, and Wiryosutomo 2022), while more recent scholarship has emphasised the importance of both technical and relational dimensions of supervision (Kurniati, Afianti, and Solehuddin 2026).

In this study, supervision and learning transfer are used to examine how learning experiences are applied after participants encounter real-world practice. The analysis focuses on mentoring, supervision, feedback, alumni networks, opportunities for practice, and conditions that may constrain skill application. From this perspective, counselling skill development is understood as an ongoing process that may continue to be adjusted after formal training has ended.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive case study design to examine the process of learning and counselling skill development within the Sekolah Happy Counselor programme at Kampoong Hening. The study was not intended to test the causal effectiveness of the programme. Instead, it sought to identify and explain how learning experiences, counselling practice, and post-training support were related to developments in the counselling practices of Associate Counselors within a specific programme context. A qualitative descriptive orientation was considered appropriate because it allowed the analysis to remain close to the experiences documented in the data, while the case study design enabled these processes to be examined within the bounded context of the Sekolah Happy Counselor programme (Sandelowski 2000; Yin 2018).

The study was conducted during 2025–2026. The primary data consisted of direct interviews with three participants who were directly involved in Sekolah Happy Counselor and whose interview records were relevant to the focus of the study. The participants comprised one programme manager, coded as P1, and two Associate Counselor alumni, coded as A1 and A2. P1 provided information concerning programme design and implementation, practice-based activities, mentoring, supervision, and the alumni network. A1 contributed an alumni perspective on the application of counselling skills within an educational professional context, whereas A2 provided accounts of applying counselling skills in community and workplace settings. Codes were used in the manuscript to minimise personal identification, although the participants' identities are retained in the research documentation.

The interviews addressed participants' experiences of managing or taking part in the programme, the learning components they encountered, practice-based experiences, reported developments in counselling practice, and conditions perceived to support or constrain the application of skills. The research material consisted of written records of direct interviews rather than complete verbatim transcripts. The analysis also drew on programme information documented in the available research materials, including the HAPPY values, counselling skills training, case studies, simulation activities, the Movement Project, mentoring, supervision, and the alumni network. Information concerning programme structure was treated primarily as programme-level evidence, whereas accounts of skill application were treated as participants' experiential evidence. Direct quotations were used only where brief expressions had been explicitly recorded in the interview notes.

The data were analysed thematically in a staged process. Interview records and programme information were first read in full to identify meaning units related to learning processes, developments in practice, and the transfer of skills. Initial codes were then assigned to relevant segments of the data, including structured skills training, simulation, practice-based experience, changes in responses to clients, initial assessment, professional boundaries, mentoring, supervision, case complexity, readiness to practise, and barriers to skill application. Codes with related meanings were subsequently grouped into broader categories covering skills learning, practice-based experience, developments in counselling practice, the supervisory environment, and conditions affecting learning transfer. Relationships across these categories were then examined to identify processual patterns within the case. The final stage generated three interrelated thematic patterns that structure the Results section: the progression from structured training to practice-based experience, developments in counselling practice, and supervision and conditions shaping the transfer of learning. This analytical procedure was informed by principles

of thematic analysis that emphasise the relationship between coding, theme development, and interpretation grounded in the data (Braun and Clarke 2021).

The credibility of the analysis was supported through evidence traceability and disciplined claim boundaries. Programme-level information was distinguished from alumni experiences, and an account reported by a single participant was not treated as representative of all Associate Counselors. Where similar issues appeared across more than one source, the accounts were compared for convergence or difference rather than assumed to constitute consensus. Interpretation was also limited to the 2025–2026 study period and to the Sekolah Happy Counselor case. Given the small number of participant perspectives and the absence of complete verbatim transcripts, the study does not claim data saturation or statistical generalisability to all alumni or other counselling training programmes. Its contribution instead lies in providing a contextualised account of how learning, practice, and post-training support were connected within the case examined.

4. RESULTS

The analysis identified three interrelated patterns. The first concerned the progression from structured training to practice-based experience. The second involved developments in the way the interviewed alumni conducted counselling. The third concerned the conditions that supported or constrained the transfer of learning into practice. In presenting the findings, P1 refers to the programme manager, while A1 and A2 refer to the two *Associate Counselor* alumni.

From Structured Training to Practice-Based Experience: The Experiential Learning Process

The learning process within Sekolah Happy Counselor showed a progression from structured skill acquisition towards application in practice-based situations. Programme information indicated that learning incorporated the HAPPY values (*High Confidence, Acceptance, People Orientation, Positive Influence, and Yearn for Blessing*), counselling communication skills, psychological concepts, case-based learning, practical activities, professional ethics, and alumni networking. At the skills-development stage, participants were introduced to *rapport building*, *mindful listening*, *mindful speaking*, *powerful questions*, *positive speaking*, *journalling*, pre-session assessment, and *call to action* at the end of a session (P1, direct interview, 2026).

Skills training was subsequently extended through case studies, simulations, and opportunities to engage with real-world helping situations. P1 explained that the programme provided practice-based experience through the *Movement Project* in a range of social contexts, including orphanages, correctional institutions, and disaster-response activities (P1, direct interview, 2026). The programme also documented post-case writing activities following participants' experiences of handling cases. These data indicate a movement from relatively structured learning situations towards encounters involving more varied helping needs and contextual demands.

A2's experience illustrates how particular techniques acquired more concrete meaning when applied in interaction with clients. A2 described *journalling* as "very powerful" because it enabled clients to record their feelings, which could subsequently be used as material for further exploration during the counselling process (A2, direct interview, 2025). Rather than functioning merely as training content, the technique was therefore experienced as a practical means of helping clients organise and explore their experiences.

Table 1. Progression from Structured Training to Practice-Based Experience

Learning stage	Documented activities	Role in the learning process
Skill acquisition	Rapport building, mindful listening, powerful questions, journalling, assessment, call to action	Provided initial tools for counselling interaction
Applied training	Case studies and simulation	Provided opportunities to practise the use of skills within relatively structured situations
Practice-based experience	Counselling sessions and the Movement Project	Expanded participants' exposure to varied contexts and helping needs
Processing experience	Documentation and written reflection following case experiences	Provided an opportunity to revisit experiences gained through practice

Source: Developed from direct interviews with P1 and A2 and documented programme information, 2025–2026.

As shown in Table 1, the learning process involved a relationship among skill acquisition, applied training, practice-based experience, and the subsequent processing of experience. Simulation functioned as an intermediate space between knowing how a skill should be used and attempting to use it in practice, while real-world experience broadened the range of situations in which the same skills had to be applied. Within this process, the *Movement Project* represented one avenue through which participants could extend their learning beyond the training setting (P1, direct interview, 2026).

Taken together, these findings suggest that learning within Sekolah Happy Counselor did not end with the delivery of content or isolated skills practice. Practice-based experience formed part of the learning process itself, while documentation following case experiences provided some evidence of opportunities to revisit what had occurred in practice. Having established how learning experiences were structured within the programme, the next section examines the forms of development in counselling practice reported by the interviewed alumni.

Development of Counselling Practice through Learning Experience

The learning experiences described above were associated with developments in how the interviewed alumni conducted counselling interactions. These developments were evident not simply in the number of techniques they reported using, but in how skills were employed to respond to clients' accounts, explore concerns, organise sessions, and recognise professional boundaries.

The clearest change was documented in A2's account. Before taking part in the programme, A2 described herself as "the kind of person who often gives advice". Following the learning and practice experiences, she reported making greater use of *powerful questions*, listening more closely, and exploring concerns from the client's perspective rather than immediately offering solutions (A2, direct interview, 2026). This account indicates a shift in response pattern, from a tendency towards advice giving to an interaction that allowed greater space for clients to articulate and examine their own experiences.

A different form of development was evident in A1's account, particularly in relation to the organisation of the counselling process. A1 reported using an initial assessment to develop an understanding of the client's situation before determining the direction of the session. A1 also described paying greater attention to professional boundaries and considering referral when a situation appeared to fall beyond the limits of the role that could appropriately be managed (A1, direct interview, 2026). Practice-based experience was also reported to have increased attention to time management and the overall structure of counselling sessions.

When considered together, the experiences of A1 and A2 point to two different but complementary dimensions of development. In A2's account, change was more evident in the quality of interpersonal responses, particularly listening, questioning, and reducing the tendency to provide immediate solutions. In A1's account, development was more evident in the organisation of the counselling process, particularly assessment, professional boundaries, and session management. The available evidence does not support the conclusion that the same developments occurred across all alumni. Rather, it shows that learning experiences were associated with more than one dimension of counselling practice among the alumni represented in this study.

These developments should also not be interpreted as a completed or uniform outcome. The interview records continued to document difficulties when participants encountered more complex cases and had to adapt their skills to less predictable situations. Counselling skill development within this case is therefore more appropriately understood as gradual and context-dependent. The following section examines the conditions that appeared to support or constrain this transfer of learning into community-based practice.

Supervision and Conditions Shaping the Transfer of Learning into Community Practice

Developments in counselling practice did not occur independently of the post-training environment. The data indicate that Sekolah Happy Counselor maintained forms of support including mentoring, supervision, alumni networks, and forums such as *Counselor Talk*. In P1's account, these forms of support provided spaces in which participants could discuss experiences, obtain input, and remain connected to the learning environment after the formal training activities had ended (P1, direct interview, 2026).

Learning transfer was also evident when alumni applied acquired skills within their existing social and professional roles. A1 used counselling-related experience in an educational setting when interacting with pupils and parents who needed space to discuss their concerns (A1, direct interview, 2026). A2 reported applying her learning in supporting mothers of children with additional needs, in workplace counselling activities, and during *Forest Camp* sessions (A2, direct interview, 2025–2026). These accounts indicate that learning was transferred across different practice settings rather than through a single uniform form of application.

At the same time, real-world practice introduced demands that were not always apparent within structured training situations. A1 continued to report challenges related to time management and the organisation of sessions, while the alumni accounts indicated that more complex cases could generate uncertainty about whether a situation could be handled independently (A1 and A2, direct interviews, 2025–2026). Under such circumstances, recognising the limits of one's role and considering referral emerged as important aspects of applying counselling skills responsibly.

The data further suggest that learning transfer was shaped by both personal readiness and contextual conditions. Across the documented experiences, motivation to support others, access to

mentors, alumni networks, and positive responses from the community appeared as conditions perceived to support continued engagement in practice. Conversely, limited time, variations in readiness or confidence to practise, case complexity, and limited material support appeared as conditions that could constrain sustained application of skills (P1, A1, and A2, direct interviews, 2025–2026).

Table 2. Conditions Supporting and Constraining the Transfer of Learning

Dimension	Documented conditions	Meaning for practice
Learning support	Mentoring, supervision, Counselor Talk, alumni network	Provided access to discussion, feedback, and continued learning
Opportunities for application	Schools, workplaces, communities, and social activities	Enabled skills to be used across different practice settings
Personal readiness	Motivation and confidence	Related to participants' readiness to initiate and sustain practice
Practice complexity	Complex cases, role boundaries, session management	Increased the need for adjustment and further support
Resources	Time and material support	Related to the intensity and continuity of engagement in practice

Source: Developed from direct interviews with P1, A1, and A2, 2025–2026.

As summarised in Table 2, the transfer of learning did not emerge as a single or automatic consequence of training. Post-training support and opportunities for practice appeared in the data as conditions that enabled participants to use and adapt their skills. At the same time, complex cases, readiness to practise, limited time, and resource constraints indicate that the application of skills remained dependent on the conditions in which practice occurred.

Overall, the three sets of findings form a connected pattern. Learning progressed from structured training towards practice-based experience; these experiences were associated with developments in how the interviewed alumni conducted counselling; and the transfer of learning into community settings was shaped by an interaction among support, opportunities for practice, personal readiness, and contextual complexity. This pattern provides the empirical basis for examining the broader theoretical and practical significance of the findings in the Discussion.

5. DISCUSSION

Within the Sekolah Happy Counselor case, the analysis identified a pattern of skill development linking structured training, practice-based experience, developments in the way counselling was conducted, and post-training support. This pattern suggests that counselling skills derive their practical significance not simply from the delivery of training content, but from opportunities to apply those skills, encounter situations that cannot be fully reproduced within training settings, and subsequently adjust practice in response to experience and available support.

This interpretation is consistent with experiential learning perspectives that position experience as a source of learning when it is processed and subsequently used to inform action (Kolb 1984). More recent literature has likewise highlighted the importance of experiential

learning in counsellor education because it connects curriculum content with learners' direct experiences (Campbell and Babb 2023). Trottier (2024) further argues that experiential activities acquire greater pedagogical value when they are accompanied by opportunities for *debriefing* and reflection. Within Sekolah Happy Counselor, the relationship among structured training, practice, documentation of experience, mentoring, and supervision is compatible with this perspective. However, the present data do not establish that every stage of an experiential learning cycle occurred formally or systematically for all participants. The empirical contribution of this study therefore lies not in demonstrating the complete operation of Kolb's model, but in identifying an observable relationship among direct experience, the processing of experience, and adjustments in counselling practice within the available data.

Counselling skill development was also evident not merely in the acquisition of techniques, but in changes in how those techniques were used. The shift from advice giving towards listening and exploratory questioning reflected an adjustment in interpersonal responses, while the use of initial assessment, greater attention to professional boundaries, and improved organisation of sessions indicated developments in process management. This interpretation is consistent with Hunsmann et al. (2024), who conceptualise counselling skills as encompassing exploration and understanding, action-oriented skills, and the management of counselling processes. The findings also complement Dermawan et al. (2022) and Oktari et al. (2025), who highlight the importance of basic counselling skills training and *role-play*. Whereas McLeod (2022) and Mahon (2023) primarily emphasise practice as a means of skill acquisition, the present case suggests that practice-based experience may also provide a setting in which participants adjust how acquired skills are used in response to actual counselling situations.

The findings concerning learning transfer further indicate that development in practice does not necessarily end when formal training is completed. Hamzah et al. (2025) show that the transfer of soft skills depends on the interaction among individual capability, opportunities for application, and motivation, while Hanum et al. (2024) demonstrate that factors affecting transfer may change after participants return to their practice environments. In the present study, mentoring, supervision, alumni networks, and opportunities for practice emerged as conditions perceived to support continued application, whereas case complexity, readiness to practise, time constraints, and limited resources appeared to restrict it. This pattern is also consistent with Chae and Backer (2024) and Aladağ and Kemer (2023), who emphasise reflection, feedback, structure, and supervisory relationships as important components of practice-based learning. In community-based mental health settings, the findings of Pallikkuth et al. (2024) and Susanti et al. (2024) further reinforce the importance of continued support when practitioners encounter complex conditions in the field.

The principal contribution of this study lies in bringing these processes together within a single case-based account. Its contribution is not the claim that experiential learning, practice, or supervision are individually new or previously unrecognised. Rather, the study identifies a processual pattern linking structured training, practice-based experience, developments in counselling practice, and the conditions shaping learning transfer within a community-based counselling skills development programme. Real-world practice therefore appears not simply as the final stage after skills have been acquired, but as a setting in which participants test how skills function, encounter limitations in their use, and recognise the need for further support. Mentoring and supervision, in turn, provide an environment in which such experiences can be reviewed and adapted.

This interpretation also clarifies the relationship between practice and supervision. Practice-based experience broadens the range of situations in which participants attempt to apply their learning, whereas supervision and mentoring provide opportunities to reconsider how those skills should be used when real-world situations differ from training scenarios. The relationship is therefore not adequately understood as a simple progression from training to independent application. Instead, the findings suggest a continuing process in which practice generates new learning needs and post-training support helps participants respond to those needs. This process is especially relevant in community-based settings, where practitioners may encounter varied client concerns while operating within different professional and social roles.

The contribution of the findings must nevertheless be interpreted within the boundaries of the study. Sekolah Happy Counselor is not a formal professional counsellor education programme, and this study does not establish the clinical competence of its participants. It is therefore more accurately described as a community-based counselling skills development programme. The findings also arise from a small number of documented participant perspectives and should not be generalised to all programme alumni. Their value lies instead in showing how skill development was experienced and interpreted within the particular case examined.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that community-based counselling skills programmes should extend beyond the provision of content and isolated technique practice. Learning designs may be strengthened by offering progressively challenging practice opportunities, structured spaces for reviewing experience, and accessible mentoring or supervision after participants begin applying skills in real-world settings. Attention to professional boundaries and referral should also form an explicit part of such programmes, particularly when participants do not hold formal professional counselling qualifications. Programme quality, therefore, depends not only on what is taught, but also on how participants are supported in applying, reviewing, and adapting what they have learned.

6. CONCLUSION

Within the Sekolah Happy Counselor case, this study identified a pattern of counselling skill development linking structured training, simulation, practice-based experience, the processing of experience, and continued mentoring and supervision. In the documented alumni accounts, this process was associated with developments in counselling practice, particularly a shift towards greater listening and exploratory questioning, together with increased attention to initial assessment, session management, and professional boundaries. The transfer of these skills into community settings did not occur automatically, but was shaped by the interaction among opportunities for practice, post-training support, participants' readiness to practise, and the complexity of the situations encountered.

The contribution of this study lies in identifying a case-based processual pattern connecting learning experience, developments in counselling practice, and the conditions shaping skill transfer. The findings suggest that counselling skill development within a community-based programme cannot be understood solely in terms of the content delivered during training. It also needs to be examined in relation to how participants gain experience in applying skills and how those experiences are supported as learning moves into real-world practice.

These conclusions should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study drew on a limited number of participant perspectives, covered the 2025–2026 study period, and relied on interview records rather than complete verbatim transcripts. The findings are therefore not intended to represent the experiences of all Sekolah Happy Counselor alumni or to demonstrate a

general improvement in counselling competence. Future research should involve a broader range of participants, employ interviews supported by complete verbatim documentation, incorporate observation or other forms of practice-based evidence, and consider longitudinal designs to examine how counselling skills are maintained and adapted over longer periods.

7. SUGGESTION

Based on the findings, Sekolah Happy Counselor may consider strengthening its post-training support through more structured mentoring and supervision, regular case discussions, and systematic opportunities for feedback on *Associate Counselors'* practice experiences. Such support may be particularly important when participants encounter more complex cases, need to make decisions regarding professional boundaries and referral, or experience difficulties in managing counselling processes. Community-based practice opportunities may also be retained as part of the learning process, provided that participants have adequate opportunities to review and adapt their practice with appropriate support.

Future studies should involve a wider range of alumni with different professional backgrounds and levels of practice experience, use in-depth interviews supported by verbatim transcripts, and incorporate observation or documentation of counselling practice where ethically and practically feasible. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for examining how practice experience, supervision, and contextual conditions relate to the maintenance and development of counselling skills over time.

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