



# Peer Counseling in the Service of Student Learning Problems: A Study of School Counselor Needs

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**Abstract.** Middle school students' learning problems are still one of the problems faced by many students and have increased during the transition from online to offline learning to the extent that they have had an impact to this day. The context of learning problems is not only related to students' abilities in the learning process but how students respond to the learning process and their learning environment. One of the players who plays a role in the student learning process is a supportive study friend. Therefore, to help deal with learning problems, counselors/counseling teachers need help from students' peers which is realized in peer counseling services. The purpose of this research is to determine and analyze school counselors' needs for peer counseling to overcome student learning problems. The research method uses a qualitative approach, the data obtained was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis stages. The results of the analysis of school counselor needs show that (1) junior high school students experience learning problems, one of which is caused by excessive use of cellphones; (2) peer counseling is needed to provide guidance and counseling services to all students; (3) peer counseling is an alternative service for students; and (4) characteristics of peer counseling with basic communication skills, empathy and the principle of confidentiality. Providing peer counseling services does not mean replacing services provided by school counselors, but peer counseling services are a support for guidance and counseling services in schools with supervision from school counselors.

**Keywords:** Peer Counseling, Learning Problems, Counselor Needs Study.

## 1 Introduction

The rapid changes in conditions that occurred after the pandemic resulted in ongoing impacts to this day [1], [2]. This condition occurs because students experience an adaptation process due to the change in the learning process from offline to online and then back to the offline learning process [3]. This change has an impact on students,

where students already feel used to the flexible online learning process which can be done anywhere without having to go to school but has changed back to an offline or face-to-face learning process with accompanying regulations [4], [5]. Especially at the junior high school (JHS) level, it is equivalent to the characteristics of early adolescents with unstable conditions in their lives, making it possible to respond negatively to changes [6].

The results of the study show that during the online learning process until the transition to the face-to-face learning process, students experience an increase in problems in the learning and learning process [7]–[9]. One of them is that the condition of academic stress experienced by students during the online learning process increases, this condition is because students are not used to participating in the online learning process as well as at the start of the face-to-face learning process students experience conditions of academic stress because of this [10], [11]. The response experienced by students is not only at the cognitive level, but the academic stress experienced by students has reached the behavioral level which is indicated by negative behaviors in the learning process such as academic procrastination [12]–[14]

Another problem related to students is students' low self-resilience in the learning process, which shows a negative response in students regarding changes or problems that occur in the learning process [15]. The results of the research that has been carried out show that having a high level of academic resilience in students will contribute to the learning outcomes achieved by students [16], [17]. The context of student problems in the teaching and learning process is not only related to the competencies possessed by students but how students respond to the learning process.

Sometimes the conditions experienced by students are closely related to the conditions of their environment, the encouragement of the learning environment greatly influences motivation, student learning outcomes and how students deal with the learning problems they face [18]–[20]. Problematic behavior in the learning and learning process of students is closely related to the use of cellphones, smartphones, the internet and online game applications [21]–[23]. If two conditions, namely the use of cellphones, smartphones, the internet and online game applications, have a supportive environment for this behavior, then these conditions will be interrelated to become the main factors in the problems faced by students related to the learning process and student learning [24], [25]. Therefore, a special approach is needed in the intervention process provided.

Guidance and counseling teachers or school counselors have an obligation to provide comprehensive services to all students [26]. However, with limited personnel and available time, assistance services are needed to be able to provide comprehensive guidance and counseling services. One service that is appropriate to the context of the conditions experienced by junior high school students is a peer counseling service [27]. Peer counseling services based on the results of the analysis show that they are in line with the characteristics of junior high school students who are very easily influenced and dependent on their peers in their environment [28]. It is hoped that the implementation of peer counseling services can help students overcome the learning problems of junior high school students. Based on this, it is necessary to analyze the needs of school counselors regarding (1) what the problematic learning conditions of junior high school students are and (2) what peer counseling models are needed to assist guidance and counseling services in schools.

## 2 Research Approach

The method used in this research process uses research with a qualitative approach [29]. The main focus in carrying out this research is (1) analyzing the learning problems faced by students based on the views of the school counselor; and (2) the characteristics of the peer counseling model when viewed based on the needs of school counselors. These two predetermined focuses will become a reference in the process of developing a peer counseling model for junior high school students to assist school counselors in implementing guidance and counseling services to help with learning problems.

Data collection was carried out by interviewing each school counselor by the research team. The research subjects were school counselors at junior high schools or madrasah tsanawiyah in the Malang, Kediri and Semarang areas. The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of (1) school counselors in a junior high school or equivalent; and (2) has provided counseling services for learning problems. The number of informants in carrying out this research was 15 school counselors who met these criteria.

The data obtained was then analyzed according to the Miles and Huberman analysis stages [30] includes data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions from the data that has been obtained. The results of this analysis are the basis for discussing the conditions of learning problems faced by students and analyzing the needs of school counselors regarding the characteristics of peer counseling needed to help school counselors overcome student learning problems.

## 3 Result and Discussion

The results of the data were obtained from the interview process with 15 school counselors at junior high school and equivalent levels spread across the Malang, Kediri and Semarang areas. Based on this data, the research results are then presented which show (1) how problematic learning conditions are faced by junior high school students; What are the characteristics of school counselors' needs for peer counseling in the service of learning problems; and (3) further synthesis of research objectives and results related to reviewing the contribution of peer counseling services in the implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools.

### 3.1 Problematic Conditions of Middle School Students' Learning

Learning problems are an important aspect to study, because these conditions need to be known in order to provide appropriate services to students. Data obtained from interviews conducted with school counselors as informants shows the condition of students after the online learning process.

*"Students are dependent on using cellphones, this is shown by the behavior of students who cannot be separated from using cellphones. When it's forbidden, they still carry it to class secretly."*

This condition is caused because during the Covid-19 pandemic or in the online learning process students are accustomed to using cellphones freely both for the learning process and for accessing social media or online games because there is no direct supervision from the teacher [31], [32]. Dependence on using cellphones is a basic part of what causes students to experience learning problems faced by students.

*"Usually students use cellphones to access social media and play online games, not for the learning process, some even access negative sites."*

The use of cellphones among junior high school students is closely related to their use for accessing social media in the form of Tik-Tok, Instagram, Twitter (x) and others [33], [34]. Apart from that, cellphone use is also closely related to excessive use of online games. Both of these activities will have a positive impact if used wisely. In current conditions, we already know that through social media and online games students can achieve achievements. However, if it is not used wisely with good self-control, this will become a problem for students in learning [35].

*"Students' learning motivation is low and they tend to lose learning.  
"Students are actually studying and not doing their assignments and even skipping school."*

Another condition experienced by students based on portraits from school counselors when dealing directly with students is low learning motivation. Passion or motivation in the learning process is the initial provision when students will follow or carry out the learning process [36]. Students' learning motivation is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, in this case extrinsic factors in the form of encouragement from the environment make a big contribution to the level of learning motivation possessed by students [37], [38]. The learning environment in the form of peers contributes to how students' motivation can increase.

### **3.2 Characteristics of School Counselors' Needs for Peer Counseling**

The problems faced by students are increasingly diverse, especially problems related to the teaching and learning process. The development of the times, demonstrated by the latest technological advances and the changes that occur constantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, has contributed to the learning problems experienced by students [39], [40]. As the provision of guidance and counseling services by school counselors is provided comprehensively to all students, special strategies are needed to provide these services. One strategy that can be implemented is through a peer counseling service model which can assist the guidance and counseling service process with assistance and supervision by school counselors [41], [42].

*"Peer counseling can be an alternative extension of guidance and counseling services to help peers overcome the problems they are facing, especially problems related to learning"*

The process of guidance and counseling services through peer counseling can be one of the strategies used by school counselors in providing services to students [43], [44]. This refers to the personnel needs of school counselors which are not ideal based on applicable regulations. In certain conditions, school counselors cannot directly identify students who are experiencing learning problems, so with the presence of peer counseling cadres, it is hoped that there will be an extension of the assistance process directly to students.

*"The skills needed by prospective peer counseling students are basic communication skills, empathy and the principle of maintaining confidentiality"*

The first characteristic shows us that school counselors' hopes for peer counseling are as an extension in the implementation of guidance and counseling services. Therefore, in implementing the services provided by peer counselor cadres, they are required to have basic understanding and skills regarding the problems they face as well as basic skills in implementing counseling communication [45]. Basic communication skills in counseling include how to ask questions, respond, empathize and have a commitment to maintaining confidentiality from the peers being helped [46]. Issues related to the principle of confidentiality are one of the main ones in the implementation of peer counseling so that its implementation requires students with certain criteria.

*"The training process to prepare peer counseling cadres needs to be prepared so that they can help their peers overcome the learning problems they face, not just vent"*

One of the main highlights in the process of discussing the need for peer counseling services to help students' learning problems in junior high schools with school counselors is how to create a cadre of students for peer counseling. The peer counseling model in the form of training is related to creating peer counseling cadres who master the basics of communication in the counseling process, have empathy and have integrity by upholding the principle of confidentiality [47].

Related methods in the learning process that can be used include: structured learning approach (SLA) which is based on the training process of guidance and counseling teachers or school counselors and case studies to help students analyze cases faced by their peers [48], [49]. The characteristics of school counselors' needs for peer counseling show that peer counseling is an alternative part of guidance and counseling services with assistance from school counselors and improvement of basic skills is needed through ongoing related training.

### 3.3 Contribution of Peer Counseling in the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools

Peer counseling services are a form of support service in the implementation of guidance and counseling services provided by peers with the concept of people of the same age or educational level [50]. Peer counseling is for individuals who are selected and have a calling to help their friends overcome the problems they are facing [51]. In this condition, peer counseling does not mean replacing the full role of school counselors in providing guidance and counseling services to students.

However, peer counseling is part of one of the service strategies carried out by school counselors in providing guidance and counseling services to students who have learning problems with assistance and supervision from school counselors. The implementation of guidance and counseling services based on peer counseling is expected to provide flexibility to students who are facing learning problems due to the same age range and the context of the situation being faced [52].

The implementation of peer counseling services provides a breath of fresh air for school counselors who have a disproportionate ratio of school counselor personnel to students and school counselors who do not have class hours at certain schools. The role of peer counseling cadres is apart from being an extension in the implementation of guidance and counseling services, they can be agents for school counselors in designing programs needed by students as well as being an extension of school counselors in analyzing the situations and conditions faced by students.

## 4 Conclusion

The implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools has challenges that must be answered wisely by school counselors. In current conditions, with learning problems faced by students and limited personnel and time, it is a challenge for school counselors to provide guidance and counseling services to all students. The results of the presentation show that (1) junior high school students experience learning problems, this is based on using cellphones for social media and playing games excessively as well as low learning motivation; (2) counselors need peer counseling services to optimize the provision of guidance and counseling services to students; (3) peer counseling is an alternative service that can be provided with assistance and supervision from a school counselor; and (4) basic counseling communication skills, empathy and the principle of confidentiality are things that need to be considered in training peer counseling cadres.

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