

# PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIAL AND JOB SATISFACTION OF MALAYSIAN SCHOOL COUNSELLORS

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Professional identity development among counselors and counselor educators has been receiving vast attention in the past years. Counselor credential is closely related to the professional identity of a counselor. In Malaysian context, the counselor credentialing involves a licensure and it is governed by law as stated in the Counselor Act 1998 (Act 580; 2006).

Professional identity is defined as the way counsellors' function, together with the way the counselors act (Machorro & Suck, 2014). As stated by Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss (2010, pp. 23-24), the successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of professional community

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would be deemed appropriate to be defined as having obtained professional identity. The certified counselor status predicted the sense of professional confidence (Chu & Sung, 2013) and thus generated a greater sense of professional identity (Darcy & Abed-Faghri, 2013).

Historically, job satisfaction was being studied and correlated with organizational commitment. In predicting employees attribute, numerous studies debated on various facets of job satisfaction, for examples, absenteeism, turnover intention (Mahdi, Mohd Zin, Mohd Nor, Sakat, & Abang Naim, 2012), performance (Edwards, Bell, Arthur & Decuir, 2008) and organizational commitment (Srivastava, 2013). However, research by Ismail (2012) and Yeşilyaprak and Boysan (2015) research in the Malaysian context revealed mixed findings.

Research efforts are lacking in identifying the association and/or differentiation between Malaysian school counselors' professional credential status and job satisfaction, despite reports indicating that counselors who worked hard for their licensure demonstrated a higher sense of professional competency, greater sense of self-respect, and perceived their work as more important as compared to those who invested less in obtaining the counselor credential (Meyer, Sweeney & White, 2002).

In a nut shell, there is an urgent need to study and examine the difference between school counselors' professional credential

status and job satisfaction. Thus, this study has two folds: 1) to examine the difference between school counselors' professional credential status and job satisfaction and 2) to illustrate the reasons for a lack of desire in obtaining the professional counselor credential under the governing body.

## **1.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **1.2.1 Procedure**

This study was conducted across the 14 states in Malaysia with a pilot test. Participants were selected via a simple random fishbowl technique through a list from the portal of Education Management Information System (EMIS). In total, 541 counselors responded and the responses were treated ethically and anonymously. In this study, the licensure status is defined by the status of registration one obtained from the Malaysia Board of Counselor (MBC) in accordance with the criteria set and stipulated in the Law of Malaysia, i.e., Counselor Act 1998.

### **1.2.2 Measurement**

The sense of job satisfaction experienced by the school counselors was assessed by using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, short-form, (Weiss, Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1967). It consists of 20 items and runs on a five-point Likert scale with responses varying from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). There are 12 items (intrinsic scale), six items (extrinsic scale) and 20 items

for general satisfaction (sum of items from intrinsic and extrinsic scales and additional two items; item 17 and 18). The internal consistency reliability coefficients reported was .850 with the intrinsic satisfaction of .906 and the extrinsic satisfaction of .812, respectively.

### 1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are:

- 1) To examine the difference between school counselors' professional credential status and job satisfaction
- 2) To examine the difference between school counselors' professional credential status and job satisfaction sub-dimensions (intrinsic and extrinsic)
- 3) To illustrate reasons for not obtaining the counselors' professional credential.

### 1.4 RESULTS

Five hundred forty-one counselors (421 females; with an average age of 39.34 years,  $SD=8.89$ ) participated in this study. Of the 541 participants, 243 participants (44.91%) are registered counselor.

	Registered			Non Registered		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Job Satisfaction	243	81.21	10.16	298	78.20	11.05
Intrinsic Satisfaction		49.42	6.549		47.27	6.847
Extrinsic Satisfaction		23.53	3.553		22.88	3.727

**Table 1** The Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables

Independent sample t-test was conducted. A significant difference was found within the group,  $t(539) = -3.277, p < .05$ . Registered counselors experienced greater job satisfaction ( $M=81.21, SD=10.16$ ) than non-registered counselors ( $M=78.20, SD=11.05$ ). The research finding coincides with the study by Ooi, Wan Jaafar & Baba (2014) which reported that registered counselors with the MBC reported a higher level of job satisfaction, self-perceived employability, professional commitment and career success.

Further study was conducted on subdomains – intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. A significant difference was reported between registered and non-registered counselors and extrinsic satisfaction, within the group,  $t(539) = -2.052, p < .05$ . The mean of extrinsic satisfaction reported for registered counselors was 23.53 (S.D.= 3.553) and mean reported for non-registered counselors was 22.88 (S.D.=3.727). The difference between registered and non-registered counselors and intrinsic satisfaction was also studied and a significant difference was found within the group,  $t(539) = -3.705, p < .001$ . The mean of intrinsic satisfaction reported for registered counselors was 49.42 (S.D.= 6.549) and mean reported for non-registered counselors was 47.27 (S.D.= 6.847).

The finding was consistent with a previous study by Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw & Rich (2010) where intrinsic satisfaction was found to better fulfil a person's desire and bring more meaning to work as compared to extrinsic satisfaction factor such as employment remuneration (pays) and pays satisfaction one perceived. It is interesting to note that the total mean score of intrinsic satisfaction, for both registered and non-registered counselor, is much higher as compared to extrinsic satisfaction. Intrinsic factors were cited as more prominent in predicting job satisfaction than extrinsic factors (Oliveira, 2011).

Variables	N	%
I do not see the needs	64	21.47
I am not interested in it	60	20.14
My degree is in another area	51	17.12
I am not aware of it	25	8.38
It is not required by my school	23	7.72
It is too stressful	13	4.36
Others	62	20.81

**Table 2** Reasons of not registered under the Act 580

Table 2 illustrated that 298 participants did not register under the Act 580 with reasons. Other reasons include 1) missed interviews, 2) pending school approval and 3) seeking funding.

## **1.5 DISCUSSION**

From the finding, the sense of job satisfaction is higher for those who have obtained licenses from the MBC. The professional

credential which comes in the form of counselor credential does show significant difference with the total score of job satisfaction as well as both the sub-domain of job satisfaction.

To promote a sense of professional identity, this requires longitudinal study and research. Research will help to shape the professionalization of school counselling and improve the professionalism of school counselors (See & Ng, 2010) thus injecting a sense of confidence among the clients.

From the response rate reported, there are gaps between the counselors and school administrators. Twenty-five (25) participants reported that they are unaware of the Act and acknowledged the need to register, whereas twenty-three (23) participants reported that such requirement is not a must in their schools. This indicates that the authority of the school system is unclear with the enforcement and the existence of the Act. The unregistered school counselors are unable to testify in court and therefore would fail in providing comprehensive services to the clients. Not only does the identity of the counselor is not clearly established in a school setting, the small number of registered counselors among the school counselor population also reflects the ignorance of the school counselors in promoting one of the main five principles of counselling – “above all do not harm”. It is not the legislative requirement that we are concerned about, but the

ethical responsibility that each counselor should be accountable for.

The counselor educators play vital roles in mentoring (Jones, Hohenshil & Burge, 2009) and ensuring the syllabus, requirement, training and curriculum are sufficient and adequate for the graduates of these courses to apply and be eligible for the licensure. Currently, each application to MBC costs RM100.00 and renewal is required every two years and it costs another RM200.00. The fee may be viewed as the constraint to the counselors, so schools may also consider absorbing the fees paid by each school counselor under the jurisdiction of the Parent Teacher Association or *Persatuan Ibu Bapa dan Guru* (PIBG). Counselors shall be encouraged on professional and personal development (PPD) by continuing education. The evidence of such continued effort, such as attending programs, or short courses or reading related books, could be used as a deciding factor in the renewal process instead of sole requiring fee. A similar process is being adopted by the American Board of Hypnotherapy (ABH, 2015).

## **1.6 CONCLUSION**

As the job satisfaction shows differences with the professional credential status, the regulatory body's role in educating, promoting, enforcing and monitoring the counselors' status is vital and unavoidable. To develop the counselor professional identity, it



is imperative for counselor educators to promote greater awareness of personal and professional programs and activities. These could include affiliation, certification and membership with a professional body such as the MBC and/or the American Counselling Association (ACA). The counselor credential with a regulatory body may set as the first step in crafting, shaping and promoting the professional identity of school counselors in Malaysia.

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