



# Examination of School Counselors' Activities: From the Perspectives of Counselor Efficacy and Collaboration with School Staff

Meral ATICI<sup>a</sup>  
Çukurova University

## Abstract

This study investigates the activities of school counselors, their perceptions of collaboration with school staff, and their feelings of efficacy when working as school counselors. Qualitative data were collected by interviewing nine school counselors who worked at various schools in Adana, Turkey. Results indicated that classroom and group guidance activities were performed regularly at the schools, especially for personal-social needs and student development. Among the responsive services, individual counseling was the activity in which the most time was spent, followed in order by consultation, crisis counseling, and referrals to outside agencies. In addition, personal-social issues and problems were most common in individual interviews and counseling, followed by educational and career issues. All the school counselors in the study expressed that they perceived themselves as efficacious and attributed this perception to various counselor-related factors. Furthermore, school personnel and students' positive perceptions of counseling also played a role in their high self-efficacy, which resulted in better cooperation and collaboration between the counselors and school staff. Finally, the results were discussed in light of related literature, and recommendations were made for future directions.

## Keywords

Counseling Activities, School Counselor, Counselor Efficacy, Collaboration.

It is emphasized that a school counselor can perform a key role in creating a caring school atmosphere by implementing comprehensive, preventative, and developmental interventions, all of which help constitute a sense of belongingness. More specifically, school counselors employ various strategies to develop a caring school community such as recognizing students in a positive manner, focusing on relationship building, providing developmental guidance lessons, conducting evaluations and needs assessments, and utilizing problem-solving techniques (Lindwall & Coleman, 2008).

Through a systematic and structured counseling program, it becomes easier for school counselors to conduct the aforementioned activities and establish a caring school environment. For example, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) establishes a framework for developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling (CSC) program within the ASCA National Model. By focusing on academic, personal-social, and career development as well as student needs, the CSC program delivers counseling and guidance services through guidance curriculums, individual

**a** Meral ATICI, Ed.D., is currently an associate professor of Psychological Counseling and Guidance. Her research interests include school counseling practices and counselor education, with a particular focus on students' professional development in training as well as the roles of internship programs. *Correspondence:* Çukurova University, Education Faculty, Educational Science Department, Division of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Adana, Turkey. Email: matici@cu.edu.tr

student planning, responsive services, and system support (Pyne, 2011). Pyne (2011) also indicated a moderate-to-strong relationship between school counselor job satisfaction and the implementation of CSC programs. In this regard, a counselor can have higher job satisfaction if school counseling programs include the following: sufficient administrative support, a clearly written and directive philosophy, effective communication between faculty and staff members, ability to serve all school students, and adequate time for program planning and evaluation.

Similarly, the school counseling program in Turkey consists of activities such as group guidance, individual student planning, responsive services, program development and research, consultations, professional development, and other activities. In addition, the Ministry of Education established classroom guidance programs in primary and secondary schools, as a part of the school counseling program, in the 2006-2007 academic year. For students to gain several competencies, teachers and school counselors are supposed to conduct classroom guidance activities with the students (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2006). In this context, Bal Bardakçı (2011) investigated the opinions of class teachers, class guidance teachers, and counselors about the comprehensive and developmental guidance programs, especially by focusing on classroom guidance activities. The results indicated that, class guidance teachers, psychological counselors, and class teachers found the classroom guidance activities helpful in meeting students' personal-social needs. The majority of the counselors stated that they provide information for teachers about guidance activities, and help them solve problems in the classroom. The counselors also emphasized the importance of collaboration with teachers.

A similar study was conducted by Hui (2003) who investigated the developmental guidance curriculum introduced in a Hong Kong secondary school. A principal, two senior teachers (responsible for guidance and discipline), the school educational psychologist, and seven classroom teachers (who delivered the guidance curriculum) were interviewed for the study. The results indicated that the curriculum positively impacted the students' behaviors and it also changed the teachers' attitudes and management styles. That is, the curriculum had a positive effect on students' self-esteem, self-appreciation, self-control, and responsibility. With the implementation of the curriculum, the teachers

began adopting positive classroom management strategies, which ultimately resulted in less misbehavior and discipline problems.

To successfully implement a developmental counseling program and its activities in a school context, school counselors should work in collaboration with teachers. For instance, Clark's and Ametea's (2004) study showed that communication and collaboration between counselors and teachers, and teamwork, were the most frequently mentioned themes in the interviews. In addition, small group counseling, classroom guidance, and individual counseling were the main topics identified as the most important services.

According to a study by Karakuş (2008), the counselors mainly consulted with teachers in regard to classroom guidance activities, dealing with behavioral problems, and preparing individual education programs for students with special educational needs. In addition, the majority of the teachers believed that the counselors' help was effective in solving their respective problems.

Sisson and Bullis (1992) examined school counselors' opinions regarding educational priorities for graduate counseling training programs, and found that dealing with personal problems, developing counseling and guidance programs, consulting with teachers about individual students, and self-understanding, were the greatest issues identified by school counselors in their preparation. Moreover, in the counseling skills domain, helping students with their personal problems was the highest ranked item, while in the consultation skills domain, consultation with teachers about individual students was the top-ranked skill.

Walsh, Barrett, and DePaul (2007) examined the daily activities of the school counselors at four elementary schools in the Boston City Connects system by analyzing written documents of their weekly activities. The findings indicated that 17% of school counselors' activities followed a programmatic approach (reflected in the categories of staff and agency support), 60% of their activities were related to a collaborative approach (reflected in the categories of service connections, individual student appraisal, family support and outreach, and individual student services), and 23% of the activities focused on prevention and advocacy (reflected in the categories of school climate activities, group services, and school screenings). In terms of the ASCA National Delivery System, 32% of school counselor activities were assigned

to the guidance curriculum (consisting of group services, family support and outreach, and school climate activities), 17% of their activities focused on individual planning (including individual student appraisal and school screenings), 34% of their activities were related to responsive services (involving individual student services and service connection), and 17% of their activities were devoted to system support (consisting of staff and agency support).

Hatipoğlu (2010) conducted a similar study of 445 school counselors from 46 different cities in Turkey with specific focus on the counseling activities of those working at primary and secondary schools. The results showed that primary school counselors mainly focused on personal-social issues in individual guidance activities, while educational issues were addressed by both primary and secondary school counselors in small and large classroom guidance activities and seminars. Primary and secondary school counselors also commented that they most frequently applied, in order: individual counseling, crisis counseling, and group counseling. It was also revealed that more than half of the counselors in both school levels carried out program development activities and half of them were occupied with evaluating program activities. Almost all the participants in the study applied individual assessment techniques and conducted consultations with teachers and parents.

Carroll (1993) found that elementary school counselors were more likely to be engaged in duties as consultants, coordinators, and counselors, rather than duties as guidance instructors and managers of school counseling programs. In an examination of the types of delivery services, Hardesty and Dillard (1994) indicated that elementary school counselors performed more consultation and collaboration, while middle and secondary school counselors engaged in more individual services and administrative duties.

Perera-Diltz and Mason (2008) examined the actual duties of school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The results showed that high school counselors engaged in more test administration and individual planning, while elementary and middle school counselors spent more time in classroom guidance curriculums (i.e., classroom instruction and group activities). Although there was a small difference between school levels, elementary school counselors performed more consultations and collaborations, whereas middle and high school counselors

were more engaged in individual counseling. Consultation, individual and group counseling, referrals, and peer facilitation of the responsive services, and collaboration and team working of system support services were endorsed by more than 75% of the school counselors in all three levels.

Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) pointed out that the school counselors in their study preferred to conduct activities following a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program. Conversely, the counselors did not prefer spending time in nonguidance-related duties.

Counselor self-efficacy has been considered a strong and significant variable in determining counselors' attitudes towards the profession and their activities in the workplace. Social support from school personnel, internships, work experience, training, and service learning play significant roles in the development of counselor self-efficacy. For example, school counselors' perceptions of support from members of the school organization and their outcome expectancy of self-efficacy can predict the differences between the actual and preferred practices of school counselors. It has been shown that school counselors are more likely to perform preferred tasks if they have high outcome expectancy and if they feel supported by the members of their schools (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). Similarly, Sutton and Fall (1995) indicated that supportive staff and administrators were the strongest predictors of high counselor efficacy expectancy. Additionally, outcome expectancy for school counselors' behavior was predicted by both a high degree of staff and administrator support and being involved in fewer noncounseling-related activities.

Gündüz' study (2012) revealed that counselors with high self-efficacy beliefs have social support and positive attitudes towards their profession. Tang et al. (2004) found that the length of internship hours and prior related work experience were positively correlated with counselors' self-efficacy. Urbani et al. (2002) emphasized that counseling students who attended skilled counselor training had greater gains in both skills acquisition and self-efficacy compared to counseling students who did not undergo such training. Barbee, Scherer, and Combs (2003) indicated that prepracticum service-learning had a significant positive relationship with counselor self-efficacy and a significant negative correlation with student anxiety. Atıcı, Özyürek, and Çam (2005) found that the self-efficacy level of counselors-in-training for group guidance activities had increased by the end of the internship

program. Yiyit (2001) found that there were low, but positive relationships between self-efficacy scores and counselors' academic grades, their years of experience, and the number of students at school. That is, as their academic grades, years of experience, and the number of students increased, their efficacy scores were higher.

In the literature, the duties and daily activities of school counselors have been examined with regard to the school level at which they worked, the school counseling programs they followed, the school personnel's perceptions about the counselors' activities, the types of deliveries, and counselor self-efficacy. Generally, the quantitative research method was used in these studies, and the duties and activities of counselors and their collaboration with school staff and counselor self-efficacy were rarely examined, especially in Turkey. Thus, this study focuses on the types of activities that school counselors are engaged in, their collaboration with school staff in implementing school counseling programs, and their self-efficacy. The qualitative research method was preferred to collect the data and in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit the counselors' ideas regarding their activities, perceptions about collaboration with school staff, and their feelings of efficacy. The school counselors were specifically invited to participate in this study since they were identified as effective models of school counselors through their work as university supervisors who counseled students and student interns. Due to these information-rich cases, this enabled the researcher to produce recommendations for counselors in both work and in training as well as for counseling student educators.

Finally, the purpose of this study was to investigate the counseling services delivered by school counselors and their perceptions of collaboration with school staff as well as their feelings of efficacy as school counselors. The following research questions were formulated to realize the aim of this study.

### Research Questions

Which activities do school counselors generally perform at school?

What are school counselors' perceptions regarding their collaboration with school personnel?

What are school counselors' perceptions concerning their feelings of self-efficacy as well as the factors that affect such feelings?

## Method

### Participants

A total of nine school counselors from different schools voluntarily participated in this study and a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) was used to collect the data. As stated earlier, school counselors were specifically invited because they were identified as effective models of school counselors through their work of counseling students and students interns as well their experience (between 2 to 10 years) as site supervisors. Among the counselors, there were six females and three males of which three worked at high schools, five worked at middle schools, and one worked at a primary school in Adana, Turkey. Five of them held master's degrees in counseling and their experience as school counselors ranged from 9 to 22 years.

### Data Collection Tool

The interviews, consisting of eight open-ended questions, were conducted with the school counselors as a qualitative data collection tool. More specifically, these eight questions were used to elicit school counselors' views regarding their guidance activities and responsive services, their perceptions of collaboration between school staff, and their feelings of efficacy.

### Procedure

The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed into a 94-page written text. The researcher and the author of this study conducted interviews with the school counselors at their schools and each interview lasted between 43 and 87 minutes, for an average of 64 minutes.

### Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed via content analysis. First, the open coding procedure was followed, which is the process of examining and categorizing relevant data by name (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this case, the interview transcripts were examined in detail by line, sentence, and paragraph, and a code or name representing a particular idea, activity or event embedded in the text was given. Then, the categories were produced by combining the related codes into a category. For example, in the coding of data regarding themes/issues of consultation, the codes of

learning difficulties, low achievement, study skills, motivation, and goal identification were grouped under the heading *academic issues or problems*. In the next stage of analysis (axial coding), the main categories and their subcategories were identified. For example, *academic issues or problems*, *emotional issues or problems*, *behavioral issues or problems* were identified as the subcategories of the main category of consultation themes/issues. In the final stage of the coding process, which is the selective coding stage, the main categories and their subcategories were grouped together. Finally, as shown in the results section, three main categories emerged: *guidance curriculum*, *responsive services*, and *counselor perceptions regarding self-efficacy and collaboration with school staff*.

### Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of collecting in-depth data through face-to-face interviews with school counselors from different schools and utilizing direct quotes from them, the results were examined by focusing on any consistencies as well as the findings of related literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

For reliability, a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis procedure was provided, which included keeping the raw data for re-examination by others, acknowledging personal assumptions and prejudices, and preventing any interference in the data analysis and interpretation process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

### Results

The results were presented under three main headings: *guidance curriculum* (including classroom and group guidance activities); *responsive services* (including individual counseling, consultation, crisis counseling, and referring); and *counselor perceptions regarding self-efficacy and collaboration with school staff*. In addition, codes (e.g., C1 or C2) were placed at the end of each quotation.

#### Guidance Curriculum: Classroom and Group Guidance Activities Conducted by Teachers and Counselors

**Classroom Guidance Activities:** Although all the school counselors in the study expressed that classroom guidance teachers and student interns

performed classroom guidance activities, seven counselors stated that they also conducted some of the classroom guidance activities themselves. Such activities focused on conflict resolution, bullying, violence, peer restraint, personal boundaries, abuse, anger management, and harmful behaviors/bad habits. Additional duties included educational activities (e.g., exam anxiety, study skills, and adaptation) and career guidance activities (e.g., applying psychological measurement tools and making career decisions). In general, personal-social activities were more likely to be conducted, followed by educational and career guidance activities. Within the personal-social activities, interpersonal relationships were the most frequently addressed, followed by self-awareness, self-acceptance, and dealing with emotions. In terms of educational activities, although study skills came first, exam anxiety, adaptation, and course choices were also significant topics. Among the career guidance activities, applying measurement tools and making career decisions were the main topics, although there was markedly less activity in this category compared to personal-social and educational activities.

Two counselors described the activities performed by teachers, counseling interns, and counselors in the following quotes:

“Normally, classroom guidance teachers do classroom guidance activities, but there are some activities that must be done by a school counselor. My counseling student interns and I conduct these activities. For example, activities related to harmful behavior, anger management, exam anxiety, bullying, and personal boundaries are conducted by a school counselor. Sometimes we perform the activities as a presentation or seminar.” (C1)

“In our school, some classroom guidance activities (e.g., study skills, course selection, and environmental conservation) are conducted by classroom guidance teachers. We, as school counselors, should conduct some activities addressing peer pressure, violence, abuse, problem solving, and conflict resolution. It may be said that a maximum of 50% to 60% of teachers do these activities well.” (C9)

School counselors also made assessments regarding how classroom guidance teachers conduct classroom guidance activities. Three school counselors felt that 60% of the teachers in their schools performed these activities as they should be performed, while six counselors expressed

the following: one-third of them performed well; 70% were performed by teachers; some teachers voluntarily performed the activities effectively; some worked collaboratively and enthusiastically; and some rarely performed what they were required to do.

In addition to the positive aspects of the teachers' activities, the counselors also mentioned problems in conducting classroom activities, which were mostly related to classroom guidance teachers. Such problems included: inability to perform the activities (n: 6); doing other things such as chatting, teaching, and allowing the students to prepare for the exams (n: 5); and performing activities without following any format (n: 2). It was also stated that such problems could have occurred since the teachers either did not feel efficacious, they felt inefficient in conducting the activities or they simply behaved as if they knew everything (n: 3). Finally, the following activities and material-based problems were emphasized: inappropriateness of the activity for the grade level; difficulties in photocopying and printing materials; and student and system-related problems (such as nonattendance and irregular planning and implementation of the activities). The following excerpts illustrate the problems associated with the teachers' classroom guidance activities:

"Classroom guidance teachers do not perform classroom guidance activities as we do. I might say this is true for some of them. For example, a teacher may just chat/talk with the students regardless of the theme/issue of that activity. He/she never considers what occurs or which competencies students acquire from the activity. He/she does not take into account the format of the activity. This is our biggest problem." (C1)

Based on the interviews, suggestions for improvement included: providing books, activity plans, and activity files (n: 5); and observing school counselors during the activity, discussing their performance afterwards, emphasizing the importance of such activities in board meetings, holding monthly meetings, requesting activity reports at the end of the term or year, and delivering memos reminding teachers about the activity schedule every two weeks (n: 2). In regard to additional solutions, one interviewee suggested the following:

"In every meeting I emphasize which activity that they are going to apply on an assigned day. I give them activity plans and an activity handbook. Of course there are teachers who do what they

should do, but our biggest problem is that some teachers perform activities without following its particular format. Sometimes I invite them to observe me while I am doing a classroom activity, so they can learn what to do." (C1)

**Group Guidance Activities:** All the school counselors stated that they, as well as the counseling interns perform group guidance activities. Similar to those of classroom guidance activities, personal-social issues were the most common topic of which interpersonal relationships were the subject of focus. Social skills training, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, behavioral problems, self-awareness, self-acceptance (self, self-esteem, and self-confidence), emotions and the control of emotions, were among the main topics of group guidance activities. Exam anxiety and study skills were the subjects of educational group activities, while the application and interpretation of the measurement tool was the subject of occupational group activities.

One counselor pointed out that she performs group activities with all of her students, which reduced the number of students requiring individual counseling. In addition, she stated that group work was more effective than classroom guidance activities. Another counselor emphasized that teachers' biases towards students decreased as a result of the changes that occurred in the students through their participation in group work. However, the counselors who wanted to conduct more group activities faced some difficulties in maintaining group attendance and finding suitable times for all of the students. According to one counselor:

"Group activities are one of the most useful activities in my school. All of my students attend group guidance activities. I have special groups for anger management and conflict resolution, especially from grades four and five. For example, last year, since many of my students had anger management problems, I thought that it would be better to train them in conflict resolution and mediation skills." (C3)

#### **Responsive Services: Consultation, Individual Counseling, Crisis Counseling, Referrals**

**Consultation:** The results of the interviews showed that school counselors generally perform consultations with teachers and parents for behavioral, academic, and emotional problems. Among the behavioral issues, misbehavior and classroom management were more likely to

be addressed than other problems. Learning difficulties, low achievement level, exam anxiety, study skills, and motivation were academic issues requiring consultation, while emotional issues and problems addressed in consultation involved bereavement, sexual abuse, and divorce. School counselors also worked with teachers regarding classroom guidance activities, communication with adolescents, and student-centered approaches. In addition, adolescent problems, communication problems, issues at home, and high expectations from children were the main topics that necessitated cooperation with parents. It was also found that counselors generally consulted with teachers and parents both individually and in groups. However, one counselor stated the following:

“I perform consultations with teachers for behavioral problems and misbehavior, while I consult with parents for personal problems like problems at home or adolescent problems. Sometimes a teacher, a parent, and I come together in dealing with misbehavior.” (C1)

The following three quotes exemplify the topic of consultations with teachers and parents:

“Sometimes parents come and ask for help, especially regarding the communication and study problems of their children. Generally, responsibility and communication problems are hidden behind study and exam problems.” (C3)

“I give teacher-parent seminars once each term on an identified topic. For example, this term, the topic of the seminar was Student-Centered Approach for Teachers, while that of the next term will be Communication with Adolescents.” (C4)

“I mainly perform consultations with parents. We invite parents if there are issues regarding academic success or behavioral concerns. Another group includes classroom guidance teachers and other teachers where we exchange knowledge about students' academic development and course achievement.” (C6)

According to the interviews, the help provided by counselors at teachers' consultations included: finding solutions to problems; giving advice on rules, instructional management, classroom management, and related problems; exchanging information about students; organizing seminars and providing books and materials regarding classroom management, testing, and classroom guidance activities; and serving as a mediator between students and teachers. Similarly, the consultations with parents included: finding

solutions to problems; giving advice and organizing seminars; conducting home visitations; organizing parent training programs for 7- to 19-year-old students; conducting triad interviews between a parent, a student, and a counselor; and using behavior monitoring schedules. As seen in the following quote, one counselor expressed how she helped teachers with classroom management problems:

“Teachers come mostly for classroom management problems. Although they mostly come when such problems are caused by students, these problems often originate from the teachers. When they ask what they can do, I ask them what they have done so far about this problem. Then, they stop and think, and say, ‘Yes, I can do this, or do that, when a problem occurs.’ Some of them behave as if there is no solution. At that time, I provide specific solutions.” (C3)

Although some counselors stated that they do not use a particular consultation approach, when the researcher reminded them of the names of consultation approaches (e.g., solution-focused, behavioral, cognitive behavioral, and Adlerian), they stated that they probably apply one or more of them.

**Individual Counseling:** Four school counselors focused attention on the difference between interviews and individual counseling, and stated that they mostly perform interviews rather than individual counseling. They also conduct individual counseling with several students for serious problems that need to be resolved over the long term. According to the school counselors, personal-social issues were the most common in individual interviews and counseling, followed by educational and career-related problems. In addition, the counselors stated that the most common interpersonal issues that the students focused on included: friendship relationships and communication; problems with peers (such as bullying and peer pressure); family problems and relationships; social skills and communication; knowing and expressing oneself, and additional problems (such as anger management, self-esteem, body image, behavioral problems, Internet addiction, bereavement, loss, and divorce). In regard to educational issues, the students generally focused on effective learning, study skills, exam anxiety, exam preparation, and adaptation. Compared to personal-social and educational issues, individual counseling was least required for career-related issues (e.g., career decisions, family

expectations and pressure, and future concerns). The number of individual counseling sessions varied between 1 and 10 (with an average of 3-4 sessions), while the length of each session ranged from 15 to 45 minutes. The following quotes include examples of individual counseling topics:

“Individual counseling with students covers the majority of work at school. Actually, I might say that I do not perform real counseling sessions with all of the students. Instead, I might say that I interview the students using counseling skills. Sometimes I begin with the student and then continue with his/her parent. I can say that individual interviews make up 60–70% of my daily activities.” (C1)

“Fifth grade students come with problems, such as adaptation problems, especially during the first term of middle school. They also come to discuss problem-solving skills and study skills. Sixth grade students come with problems such as signs of puberty, relationships with the opposite sex, conflicts among their group, study skills, friendship relationships, expressing themselves, name calling, and teasing.” (C1)

“Issues or problems for individual counseling mainly include: knowing oneself, friendships, and family relationship problems. Family problems are the most typical conflicts, which is followed by personal–social problems, educational issues (e.g., motivation and study skills), and career-related concerns.” (C4)

**Crisis Counseling:** The school counselors expressed that they deal with various crises at school. Firstly, there are crises along the lines of aggressiveness, violence, and abuse, followed by accidents and injuries, illness, loss, bereavement, running away from home and/or school, school nonattendance, and rule infractions. When the interview texts regarding crisis intervention were analyzed, the results could be grouped into three headings, namely: *student-related intervention* (the most common type), *school personnel and parent-related intervention*, and *cooperation with outside agencies*. Among these interventions, calming students down, talking with and interviewing them, performing classroom guidance activities, and psycho-educational training were the most used strategies. Additionally, serving as a mediator in conflict resolution, helping students resolve their conflicts, changing a student’s classroom, and preparing a crisis report were also regarded as student-related interventions. Although calling parents and helping them were applied more

frequently, collaboration with the principal and interviews with the classroom teacher made up the school personnel and parent-related intervention. In terms of cooperation with outside agencies, school counselors reported that in some crisis situations, they had to call the child welfare section of the police department, ask for help from health agencies, take the student to the hospital or refer the student to a psychiatrist. The following two excerpts illustrate what counselors can do when a crisis occurs in their school:

“I regularly organize a psychosocial crisis prevention program. I try to reach families as well. However, inevitably, some crisis occurs and we cannot prevent it from happening. For example, a terrible event occurred last term where a student attacked and injured another student. After that event, some students were afraid and anxious about coming to school. We had to call the police. This was a difficult time for both teachers and students.” (C5)

“I have applied a psychosocial crisis prevention program. ...we lived through two crises in the past. There was an argument and a fight between a parent and the canteen worker in the recess area. The canteen worker was injured. Almost all of the students witnessed this bad event. Another event was a student’s death due to drowning. It was on a Monday. I went to all of the classrooms and listened to the students. I attempted to create an atmosphere in which they could express their sadness and sorrow. I also shared my own feelings regarding this loss, and told them how they could protect themselves from possible dangers around them. ...I am going to work especially hard with this class in order for them to effectively deal with this crisis.” (C7)

**Referring:** When school counselors were asked in which circumstances they referred students to outside agencies, psychiatric problems and special education issues were the main reasons for such referrals. The psychiatric problems, in order, included: depression, anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, psychotic disorder, hypochondria, suicidal tendencies, introversion, exam anxiety, harming oneself, anorexia, abuse, rape, and bereavement. In addition, special needs problems requiring referrals to the Guidance and Research Center included: hyperactivity, attention deficit, learning difficulties and problems, special needs, and dyslexia. The school counselors also noticed that in the referral system, apart from diagnosing problems, there was no intervention



from the Guidance and Research Center due to their lack of relevant expertise and difficulties in getting appointments from psychiatric clinics. In regard to referrals to a psychiatric clinic, one counselor stated:

"If a student is depressed or tends to be suicidal, I refer the student to an outside agency or psychiatric clinic. After a medical examination, we decide what action to take. I am not the person that makes the diagnosis. For example, now there is a student who has a very weak self-concept and she does not speak at all. She always wears her coat and never takes it off despite the hot weather. As a result, she has trouble establishing friendships." (C2)

When the school counselors were asked to identify the time devoted to activities, the following results were obtained: individual counseling (30%); classroom guidance activities (24.44%); group guidance activities (16.11%); consultations (13.33%); crisis counseling (10.55%); and referrals (5.33%). In terms of a comprehensive developmental counseling program, it can be concluded that approximately 40% of the time was devoted to the guidance curriculum component of the program, while 60% of the counselor's time was spent in the responsive services component of the program.

### **Counselor Perceptions regarding Self-efficacy and Collaboration with School Staff**

**Counselor Self-efficacy:** All of the school counselors pointed out that they felt efficacious in working as school counselors and expressed their feelings by using terms such as "feeling efficacious" (n: 4), "feeling very efficacious" (n: 1), "feeling sufficient" (n: 1), "feeling good" (n: 1), and "working good" (n: 1). However, one counselor mentioned her shortcomings in bureaucratic procedures while the other focused attention on development needs in school counseling. When talking about their feelings of efficacy, they also mentioned that they possess communication skills and confidence, they try to improve themselves, they work collaboratively with principals, teachers and parents, they are very good at communicating with principals and teachers about classroom and group guidance activities. After the counselors were asked to self-rate their feelings of efficacy on a 100-point scale, one counselor gave a 95 out of 100, two counselors gave 90–95, one counselor gave 85–90, two counselors gave an 80, two counselors gave a 70, and one counselor gave a 60. Although

the counselors believed that counselor-related factors contributed the most to their feelings of efficacy, working with young personnel, having school personnel and students place importance on their ability to solve problems, and their positive perception of psychological counseling and guidance also played roles in such feelings. The following quotes present counselors' perspectives of self-efficacy:

"I definitely see myself as good in school counseling. As a school counselor, I feel efficacious in cases related to counseling at school. I should give myself nothing less than 90 out of 100. In fact, I can give 90–95." (C1)

"It changes from time to time. In fact, I love my job. I know this. In terms of practice, I can give 90–95 out of 100." (C2)

"As a school counselor, I see myself as very efficacious. I can give myself 85–90 out of 100. I say this mainly based on trusting my hunger/effort for knowledge and learning." (C3)

"I feel very efficacious. It seems as bit of megalomaniac, but I feel very efficacious and competent. Can it be done better? Of course it can. Since I love to work as a school counselor, I feel competent and efficacious. I can give myself a 95 out of 100." (C4)

"I do not know whether it is an exaggeration, but I can give myself 80 out of 100. Of course, I have shortcomings, but I always try to improve myself in my field, especially in school counseling." (C5)

"Of course I do not want to be unfair to myself. There are things that I am very good at, but there are other things that I need to improve. Therefore, I tell myself that I should read and learn something every day. I think I am efficacious at working with classes, groups, teachers, and principals. I can give myself a 70 out of 100." (C8)

Loving people and the profession, and the appropriateness of personality characteristics in carrying out their duties, were the most distinctive factors that affected counselor self-efficacy. The school counselors explained their love of the profession and people by using expressions such as "loving and giving importance to their job and the profession," "being enthusiastic about working as school counselors," "helping people," "loving the school atmosphere," and "loving the students and adolescents." The counselors also explained the appropriateness of their personality characteristics for the profession by referring to

characteristics of being empathetic, functioning as mediators, and being sensitive towards people. According to the counselors working in a planned and disciplined manner, being aware of their limitations, being responsible, and meeting expectations also contributed to their sense of efficacy. Moreover, training, experience, continuity learning and development, participating in service training, sharing, helping and cooperation among colleagues, working for a Guidance and Research Center, following professional literature, reading professional books, and participating in social activities outside of school were also among the factors that affected efficacy.

The counselors' ideas about the sources of efficacy can be seen in the following quotes:

"Firstly, I love my job very much. Another thing is that my personality is very coherent with my job. Our work requires me to mediate, to communicate, to be empathetic, and to be sensitive, which are all in my personality." (C1)

"Indeed, my personality is suitable for this job. Loving my work and reading also have a powerful effect on my feelings of efficacy." (C2)

"Working at the Guidance and Research Center was effective....In addition, I love the school atmosphere. In the morning, I come to school with joy and pleasure, just as I went to school as a child. I think this is very effective. I come with joy. Working in a planned way facilitates my job and shows me the way to achieve." (C3)

"I definitely love the profession. I love the adolescents." (C4)

"To begin with, I love my field. In addition, being helpful to people, working towards goals and achieving them are motivational tools for me. I try to follow periodicals. I read them. I try to talk and collaborate with my colleagues on a regular basis." (C5)

#### **School Counselors' Collaboration with School Staff:**

All of the school counselors stated that they worked with school personnel cooperatively and collaboratively. In addition, the teachers in their schools believed in the school counselors, communicated and collaborated with them, had a positive perception about counseling, and really enjoyed the seminars. Five counselors emphasized the importance of their respective principal's support, cooperation, trust, and value of the counseling profession. The counselors also admitted that when they worked effectively in

school, the personnel positively perceived the school counselors and their field. If there was successful collaboration in school, then they felt efficacious, and this, in turn, improved cooperation.

In general, communication with teachers is also extremely important for reaching students and parents. In this regard, the counselors reported that if the principal caused any problems in establishing communication and collaboration, then they would initiate legislative procedures. Moreover, experienced teachers' assumption of "I know everything" and crowdedness of schools sometimes prevented school counselors from working collaboratively with school personnel. Several school counselors described their collaboration with school staff and the importance of such collaboration in the workplace as follows:

"Teachers, students, and the principal have positive views on counseling. To begin with, the perspective of the principal is very important for our work or for us as school counselors." (C1)

"...Completely supportive, especially my principal is very supportive. I am very happy with that. He believes in counseling. This is very rare among school principals. I feel very lucky. When I expressed this to him, he said this is because of me. He said that I established this confidence and trust between us. Therefore, I get unlimited support whenever I need it. He announces this support in every meeting and platform. He tells the staff that they benefit from effective guidance service." (C4)

"I work in a supported context. This is my advantage. My principal always supports my counseling and guidance activities." (C5)

"I believe that I have established very good communication with the school staff. For this reason, the principals support me unconditionally. According to them, what I do is right. They always tell me that they trust me unconditionally and they do not think I do anything wrong. This is an honor for me. I also have good communication and trustworthy relationships with the teachers." (C7)

"In order to work collaboratively with the principals and teachers, a school counselor must be competent in his/her job. I am not saying this to praise myself. I once tried to make people accept me as a school counselor in a certain situation, sometimes at the expense of painful experiences, because when they see that you are inexperienced or inefficacious, in some circumstances, they will work against you." (C8)

### Discussion and Conclusion

According to Lindwall and Coleman (2008), developmental guidance lessons are one of the strategies used by school counselors to evolve a caring school community. Consistent with this idea, classroom and group guidance activities, which are the components of the guidance curriculum, were performed regularly at the schools in which the participants of the current study worked as school counselors. This was also verified by the figures, provided by the school counselors that classroom and group guidance activities had taken up 40% of their time (24.44% for classroom guidance activities; 16.11% for group guidance activities). This result is also similar to the finding that 32% of school counselor activities are assigned to the guidance curriculum (Walsh et al., 2007). The results of this study are also supported by Perera-Diltz and Mason's (2008) finding that elementary and middle school counselors spend more time in classroom guidance curriculums (i.e., classroom instruction and group activities).

Previous studies have indicated that classroom guidance activities were helpful in meeting students' personal and social needs (Bal Bardakçı, 2011) and that the guidance curriculum had a positive effect on students' self-esteem, self-appreciation, self-control, and responsibility (Hui, 2003). In line with these findings, classroom guidance activities for personal-social needs and development were more common than those for educational and career needs and development (in both classroom and group guidance activities) in this study. Similarly, Hatipoğlu (2010) found that educational issues were addressed by both primary and secondary school counselors in both small and large classroom guidance activities and seminars. From these results, one can assume that the school counselors spent reasonable time and effort on classroom and group guidance work, which positively affected students' personal-social, educational, and career development. Thus, it would be important to deliver preventative guidance services to all school students.

The school counselors called attention to problems associated with classroom guidance activities conducted by the teachers, meaning that the activities could not be performed as they were planned. They also suggested solutions for these problems among which counselors' help and guidance for teachers became apparent. Similarly, Bal Bardakçı (2011) indicated that the majority of counselors in her study provided information for teachers about guidance activities, which ultimately helped them solve problems in the classroom.

From the figures provided by the counselors, individual counseling was the activity given the most time among the three remaining services (e.g., consultation, crisis counseling, and referring). This may be due to school counselors' perception of their role in helping students individually or it may be explained by the real demand for individual counseling, since students may feel more comfortable talking about their problems or issues during these sessions. Hatipoğlu (2010) had similar findings for primary and secondary school counselors, and they frequently conducted, in order, the following services: individual counseling, crisis counseling, and group counseling. Walsh et al. (2007) indicated that 34% of counselors' activities consisted of responsive services involving individual student services and service connection. The time devoted to responsive services in the present study was higher than those revealed in the study by Walsh et al. (2007). This may be because they computed the time spent on four components of the program (e.g., guidance curriculum, responsive services, system support and individual planning), whereas the present study examined the time devoted to two components of the program (e.g., guidance curriculum and responsive services).

There was a distinction made by the school counselors between individual interviews and counseling with the students. For example, four of them emphasized that they primarily conduct interviews, which are shorter than individual counseling sessions, while individual counseling with several students are also performed for serious problems that need to be resolved over the long term. Personal-social issues and problems such as interpersonal relationships and communication, self-awareness, self-acceptance, and crisis were the most common in individual interviews and counseling sessions, followed by educational (e.g., learning and study problems, exam preparation) and career issues and problems. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that students are more likely to have personal-social needs and problems that arise during individual counseling than educational and career ones.

These results shared similarities with the following findings: primary school counselors primarily focused on personal-social issues in individual guidance activities (Hatipoğlu, 2010); individual counseling was one of the main themes identified as an important service (Clark & Ametea, 2004); and that helping students with their personal problems was the highest-ranked item in an examination of

school counselors' opinions regarding educational priorities for graduate counseling training programs (Sisson & Bullis, 1992). In addition, consultations with teachers were the first-ranked skill by school counselors in terms of their educational priorities for graduate counseling training programs (Sisson & Bullis, 1992). Counselors also emphasized the importance of collaboration with teachers (Bal Bardakçı, 2011), especially since teachers reported that communication and collaboration between counselors and teachers was the most frequently mentioned theme (Clark & Ametea, 2004).

Consistent with these findings in the literature, the results of the interviews showed that the school counselors performed consultations with teachers and parents on behavioral, academic, and emotional issues and problems. This finding was supported by the results of Karakuş's (2008) and Hatipoğlu's (2010) study in which counselors mainly consulted with teachers for dealing with classroom guidance activities and behavioral problems. In addition, the majority of the counselors in their studies performed consultations with the teachers and parents. Perera-Diltz and Mason (2008) also indicated that elementary school counselors performed the most consultations (97% to 98%).

This study revealed that the school counselors applied multiple strategies in the consultations. For example, finding solutions for problems, giving advice and information, organizing seminars, and providing books and materials, were the ways that they helped the teachers and parents. It is clear that when the researcher provided the names of consultation models, the counselors were able to identify the models (e.g., solution focused, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, and Adlerian approaches) used in their consultations with the teachers and parents. However, some counselors admitted that they did not use a particular approach in their consultations. This may be because they were not trained in such consultation models. Thus, this must be considered by counseling educators when they plan their respective school counseling programs.

All of the school counselors in the study expressed that they perceived themselves as efficacious and their self-efficacy ratings ranged between 60 and 95 on a 100-point scale. However, two of them also mentioned their shortcomings and developmental needs in their profession. In addition, they related these feelings of efficacy to their communication skills and confidence, their efforts in self-improvement, and effective collaboration and communication with school personnel and parents.

Among the most effective counselor-related factors included: loving the profession, consistency between their personality and the profession, working in a planned way, being aware of their limitations, being responsible, meeting expectations, training, experience, effort in continuity learning and development, and participating in service training. Additionally, school personnel and students' positive perception of counseling also played a role in their efficacious feelings.

It must be emphasized that if there is collaboration between counselors and school staff, then counselors' efficacy can increase. As a result of feeling efficacious, they are more likely to work collaboratively with school personnel. This finding also highlights the importance of principals, teachers, and students' perceptions of counseling in counselors' self-efficacy. Similarly, Sutton and Fall (1995) indicated that supportive staff and administrators were the strongest predictors of high counselor efficacy expectancy.

The results regarding factors that affect counselor self-efficacy were supported by the findings of several studies. For example, social support and positive attitudes towards their profession (Gündüz, 2012), the length of internship hours and prior related work experience (Tang et al., 2004), skilled counselor training (Urbani et al., 2002), pre-practicum service learning (Barbee et al., 2003), internship programs (Atıcı et al., 2005), and years of experience (Yiyit, 2001) were the variables positively related to counselor self-efficacy.

All the school counselors in the study stated that they worked with school personnel cooperatively and collaboratively and that teachers in their schools believed in the school counselors as well as counseling in general. They also emphasized the importance of the principal's support, cooperation, trust, and value for the counseling profession. Furthermore, working effectively resulted in the school personnel's positive perception towards school counselors and counseling services. In Clark's and Ametea's (2004) study, counseling students also emphasized the importance of collaboration between teachers and counselors, availability of counselors for both teachers and students as well as the role of school counselors in establishing positive classroom environments. However, there were several school counselors who also encountered problems and resistance from their principals and some teachers even prevented them from working collaboratively with school personnel.

Based on the results of this study, it is understood that school counselors performed several activities that appeared in the guidance curriculum and responsive services component of the developmental counseling program. Having carried out these activities effectively, the school counselors were able to establish cooperation and collaboration with the school staff, and, in turn, this collaboration contributed to counselor self-efficacy. In addition, it can be concluded that performing the activities effectively can help counselors maintain positive perceptions about the school counseling program and the counseling field. More importantly, the more they worked cooperatively with the school staff, the more they felt efficacious.

Since some teachers have problems conducting classroom guidance activities, school counselors can help teachers in various ways such as providing opportunities for them to observe counselors conducting similar activities, offering feedback, and holding regular monthly meetings to discuss any problems. This is important for teachers, especially when they need feedback to realize and correct their mistakes as well as assess their skills. Finally, although the school counselors in this study could identify the consultation models that they used (upon being reminded of the names of the models), it seemed that they required additional training

in the various models. In the future, counseling educators should consider this finding, especially when they are planning school counseling programs and related courses.

#### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

There were several limitations in this study that need to be addressed. First, although the in-depth interviews with several counselors from different schools provided rich information regarding the subject at hand, a limited number of counselors participated in the study since it was only conducted by one researcher. If more researchers were involved, then it would be possible to collect data from a greater number of counselors. Second, since school staff and students were not involved in the interviews, only the counselors' perspectives were obtained in this study. If additional parties are involved in future studies, then it can allow researchers to examine the counselors' activities and collaborations from different perspectives. Perhaps future studies can even include principals, teachers, and students. Finally, counselor efficacy was identified in this study by simply asking school counselors what they thought about their feelings of efficacy. Conceivably, a self-efficacy scale could be used in future studies to describe counselors' efficacy levels.

## Reference

- Atıcı, M., Özyürek, R., & Çam, S. (2005). Okul danışmanlığı uygulamalarının yetkinlik beklentisi algılarının ve mesleki benlik saygısı üzerindeki etkilerinin boylamsal olarak incelenmesi. *Türk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Dergisi*, 3(24), 7-24.
- Bal Bardakçı, A. (2011). İlköğretim okullarında çalışan sınıf öğretmeni, sınıf rehber öğretmeni ve psikolojik danışmanların kapsamlı gelişimsel rehberlik programına ilişkin görüşleri (Master's thesis, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey). Retrieved from tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi
- Barbee, P. W., Scherer, D., & Combs, D. C. (2003). Prepracticum service-learning: Examining the relationship with counselor self-efficacy and anxiety. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 43(2), 108-119.
- Carroll, B. W. (1993). Perceived roles and preparation experiences of elementary counselors: Suggestions for change. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 27, 216-226.
- Clark, M. A., & Ametea, E. (2004). Teacher perceptions and expectations of school counselor contributions: implications for program planning and training. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(2), 132-136.
- Gündüz, B. (2012). Okul psikolojik danışmanlarında yetkinlik inancı ve tükenmişlik. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 12, 1761-1767.
- Hardesty, P. H., & Dillard, J. M. (1994). The role of elementary school counselors compared with their middle and secondary school counterparts. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 29, 83-91.
- Hatipoğlu, H. (2011). Okullarda yürütülen psikolojik danışma ve rehberlik uygulamalarının belirlenmesi ve bazı değişkenler açısından incelenmesi (Master's thesis, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey). Retrieved from tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi
- Hui, E. K. P. (2003). A guidance curriculum for student development: A qualitative study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 25(2/3), 157-168.
- Karakuş, S. (2008). İlköğretim okullarında çalışan psikolojik danışmanların sınıf öğretmenleri ve sınıf rehber öğretmenleriyle yaptıkları konsültasyon çalışmalarının incelenmesi (Master's thesis, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey). Retrieved from tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi
- Lindwall, J. J., & Coleman, H. L. K. (2008). The elementary school counselor's role in fostering caring school communities. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(2), 144-148.
- Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı. (2006). İlköğretim ve ortaöğretim kurumları sınıf rehberlik programları el kitabı. Retrieved from http://org.meb.gov.tr
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Perera-Diltz, D. M., & Mason, K. L. (2008) Ideal to real: Duties performed by school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling*, 6(26). Retrieved from http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v6n26.pdf
- Pyne, J. R. (2011). Comprehensive school counseling programs, job satisfaction, and the ASCA National Model. *Professional School Counseling*, 15(2), 88-97.
- Scarborough, J. L., & Culbreth, J. R. (2008). Examining discrepancies between actual and preferred practice of school counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86, 446-459.
- Sisson, C. F., & Bullis, M. (1992). Survey of school counselors' perceptions of graduate training priorities. *School Counselor*, 40(2), 109-118.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and technique*. London: Sage.
- Sutton, J. M., & Fall, M. (1995). The relationship of school climate factors to counselor self-efficacy. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 73, 331-336.
- Tang, M., Addison, K. D., LaSure-Bryant, D., Norman, R., O'Connell, W., & Stewart-Sicking, J. A. (2004). Factors that influence self-efficacy of counseling students: an exploratory study. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 44(1), 70-80.
- Urbani, S., Smith, M. R., Maddux, C. D., Smaby, M. H., Torres-Rivera, E., & Crews, J. (2002). Skills-based training and counseling self-efficacy. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 42(2), 92-108.
- Walsh, M. E., Barrett, J. G., & DePaul, J. (2007). Day-to-day activities of school counselors: Alignment with new directions in the field and the ASCA National Model. *Professional School Counseling*, 10(4), 370-378.
- Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2008). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri* (7th ed.). Ankara: Seçkin Yayınevi.
- Yiyit, F. (2001). Okul psikolojik danışmanlarının yetkinlik beklentilerini ölçmeye yönelik bir ölçek geliştirme çalışması (Master's thesis, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey). Retrieved from tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi