

## Individual student planning: Counselors' strategies for development of academic success in middle-school students

A.R. Kumara & C.P. Bhakti  
*Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia*

B. Astuti & Suwardjo  
*Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

**ABSTRACT:** Students' academic success includes aspects of academic achievement, the achievement of learning outcomes, the acquisition of skills and competencies, satisfaction, and persistence, and determines post-college further education. The purpose of guidance and counseling in schools is to play a role in the optimal development of student potential. Guidance and counseling use multiple services to develop student academic success. Individual student planning services support learners in formulating and conducting activities related to planning their futures according to an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as an understanding of the opportunities available in their environment. In terms of the development of student academic success in middle school, counselors facilitate students by helping them understand their potential through interventions such as individual appraisals, helping students to interpret their self-potential test results, and providing information on further study and work on the basis of student potential. Individual planning service strategies can be implemented through classroom guidance, in both group and individual settings, and may involve other relevant stakeholders.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Middle school represents a major transition in a student's academic career. For most students, it means changing schools, adjusting to a longer school day, changing teachers according to course content, and meeting the demands of more complex assignments that require independent learning and critical thinking skills. Given these challenges, the fact that many students require additional support to enjoy academic success in middle school is not surprising (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

It is unsurprising that researchers hesitate to define what constitutes student success. The term has been applied with increasing frequency as a catch-all phrase encompassing numerous student outcomes. The term 'academic success' is only slightly narrower, with the nuanced descriptor 'academic' intended to limit the term's application to the attainment of outcomes specific to educational experiences (York et al., 2015).

The 21st century presents an array of challenges and opportunities for school counselors to renew their practice and respond to the climate of school reform. Voices from the profession have called for a shift in the role of the professional school counselor from that of service provider to one of promoting optimal achievement for all students (Dahir & Stone, 2012).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012) has advocated that school counselors establish their identity and clearly articulate and define the role that school counseling programs play in promoting student achievement and educational success. New-vision school counselors work intentionally with the express purpose of reducing the environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success. School counselors are challenged to demonstrate accountability, document effectiveness, and promote the contributions

of school counseling to the educational agenda (Dahir & Stone, 2012), and they are in a unique position to exert a powerful influence. The contributions of school counseling can support every student's progress through school to help each emerge more capable and more prepared than ever before to meet the challenging and changing demands of the new millennium.

Brown and Trusty (2005) suggest that the school counselor's primary mission is the improvement of academic achievement. The research literature regarding school counselors' efforts in relation to academic achievement concludes that there is little support for the supposition that comprehensive school counseling programs improve achievement. Conversely, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that school counselors can use strategic interventions to improve academic achievement.

Within the systemic framework of comprehensive school counseling programs, middle school counselors have a vital role in collaborating with other educators to promote the academic development of early adolescents. Research pertinent to contemporary middle-school counseling in this developmental domain is summarized by Sink (2005), especially as it may relate to program activities and interventions; implications and recommendations for best practice are included.

Gysbers and Henderson (2012) argued that the successful implementation of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program is supported by the implementation of four components: (1) basic services, (2) responsive services, (3) individual planning services, (4) system support. In order to establish a comprehensive guidance and counseling model, the Indonesian government issued Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation no. 111 of 2014 on Guidance and Counseling in Basic Education and Secondary Education (RoI, 2014). This regulation refers to the presence in the program components of basic services, responsive services, individual planning services and specialization, and system support. In line with the implementation of the 2013 curriculum, it places emphasis on individual planning services and specialization, with a particular focus on specialization services.

## 2 METHOD

### 2.1 *Basic concepts of individual planning services*

The term individual planning is sometimes confusing for those investigating school counseling programs. One might logically assume that because the word 'individual' appears in the title, the associated services are delivered to students on an individual basis. As related to this program element, the word individual actually means that the counselor uses whatever methods are most appropriate for helping individuals make plans about their future (Van-Zandt & Hayslip, 2001). School counselors want to help young people make careful decisions by exploring all their options, using many sources of information and identifying probable outcomes. That goal guides this program element. Some examples of the approaches counselors can take to accomplish this include individual counseling and group counseling of students, consultation with parents and teachers, coordination of community resources, classroom guidance focused on careers education, and the development and maintenance of careers information centers. In these ways, counselors and others assist all students in the development of career life plans consistent with their personal/social, academic, and career goals (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Gysbers and Henderson categorize these interventions as individual appraisal, advisement, and placement and follow-up.

ASCA (2012) states that individual student planning consists of ongoing systemic activities designed to help students establish personal goals and develop future plans, such as individual learning plans and graduation plans. School counselors use these activities to help all students plan, monitor and manage their own learning as well as to achieve academic, career and personal/social competencies aligned with the school counseling core curriculum.

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (RoI, 2008), individual planning is defined as an aid to learners in formulating and conducting activities related to planning of their future based on an understanding of their personal advantages and disadvantages, as well as an understanding of the opportunities available in the environment. In-depth

understanding of the counselee with all their characteristics, interpretation of their assessment results, and the provision of accurate information in accordance with the opportunities and potential of the counselee are needed so that the counselee is able to choose and make the right decisions in optimally developing their potential, including gifted and special needs counsees. This is in line with the opinions expressed by Gysbers and Henderson (2012): individual planning is a systematic activity designed to help learners understand and take action to develop plans for their future.

## *2.2 Purpose of individual planning services*

According to RoI (2008), individual planning aims to assist the counselee in: (1) having an understanding of themselves and their environment; (2) being able to formulate the goals, planning, or management of their own development, whether involving personal, social, learning or career aspects; (3) being able to perform activities based on the understanding, goals, and plans that have been formulated. The purpose of individual planning can also be formulated as an effort to facilitate the counselee in planning, monitoring, and managing their own educational, career, and social development plans. The contents of individual planning services are things that the counselee needs to understand, specifically:

- a. Preparation for further education, career planning, and development of sociocultural skills, based on their own knowledge, and information about school, the world of work, and their community.
- b. Analysis of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the achievement of their goals.
- c. Measures for the level of achievement in their goals.
- d. Decision-making that reflects their planning.

## *2.3 Focus on individual planning development*

According to RoI (2008), the focus of individual planning services is closely related to the development of academic, career, and social-private aspects. In detail, the scope of the focus includes, among others: (1) the development of academic aspects, including the utilization of learning skills, conducting advanced education electives or choice of majors, choosing appropriate courses or additional lessons, and understanding the value of lifelong learning; (2) careers, including the exploration of career opportunities and work practices, and understanding the need for positive work habits; (3) socio-personality aspects, including the development of a positive concept of self and effective social skills.

## *2.4 Focus individual planning activity at each level of education*

According to Cobia and Henderson (2003), the focus of individual service planning activities is illustrated by the levels and categories of service interventions shown in [Table 1](#).

## *2.5 Individual planning service strategy*

Schwellie-Giddis and Kobylarz (cited in Cobia & Henderson, 2003) include and expand on the interventions identified by Gysbers and Henderson (2012) to help students gather, analyze, synthesize, and organize information related to their future, and which can be modified for different age levels:

- a. Outreach. An approach used to alert all students to the information and services available.
- b. Classroom instruction. Curriculum activities delivered by teachers and counselors in large group activities; integrating career concepts into academic instruction makes material meaningful to students.
- c. Counseling. Focusing on helping students in an individual or small group forum to explore personal issues that relate to their plans for the future. Students examine ways to apply

Table 1. Focus of individual planning service activities in each level of education.

Appraisal	Advisement	Placement	Career
K-3 Special needs	As needed for special concerns	Special needs	Awareness of work/self; exposure to concepts
4-5 Special needs Achievement Aptitude Intelligence Interests	Educational planning; middle-school curriculum	Middle-school choices	Awareness of work/self; choices; exposure
6-8 Special needs Achievement Intelligence Interests	Educational planning; high-school curriculum	High-school choices; work experience/ service learning possibilities	Exploration of self/careers; set preliminary goals
9-12 Special needs Achievement Aptitude Intelligence Interests Personality Entrance exams	Educational planning/ career planning; post-secondary preparations	Continuing high-school choices; work experience/service learning possibilities/ post-secondary options	Continuing and deeper exploration of self/ careers; set goals; implement plans

information and skills they have learned to the development of their individualized educational and career plans.

- d. Assessment. Assessment includes the administration and interpretation of both formal and informal measures and gives students a clearer understanding of their skills, abilities, interests, achievements, and needs.
- e. Career information. Resources that provide current and unbiased information to students about occupations, educational programs, post-secondary training, the military, and employment opportunities.
- f. Career information delivery system. In some states, a computer-based career information delivery system includes comprehensive, accurate, and current information about occupations and education/training opportunities.
- g. Work experience. Students have chances to participate in actual work settings.
- h. Placement. Resources and assistance are provided to help students make a successful transition from high-school to employment, post-secondary education, military service, or other options.
- i. Consultation. Counselors give direct assistance to teachers, administrators, parents, and others who interact with students to help them better understand career development and strategies for supporting it.
- j. Referral. For students who have barriers that may inhibit career development, school counselors recognize the problems and make appropriate referrals.
- k. Follow-up. Counselors maintain long-term contact with students as they move through their school years and beyond

### 3 DISCUSSION

Interventions by individual planning services in the development of academic success can be through a variety of strategies. One of the most effective interventions for developing academic success is group intervention, as illustrated by the research of Webb and Brigman (2007) into the Student Success Skills (SSS) small group intervention developed for school counselors targeting academic outcomes. The SSS program is based on extensive reviews of research about the skills that students need to be successful. Studies supporting program effectiveness were briefly reviewed and showed consistent patterns of improved academic achievement outcomes for group treatment of students. The structured group format and intervention are described in detail, together with effective school counselor group work practice.

Shi and Steen (2012) reinforced this view with their research on the Achieving Success Everyday (ASE) group model, which is used to promote self-esteem and academic performance in students of English as a Second Language (ESL). The findings from the preliminary data indicated that the participants' self-esteem was improved by participation in the group. There was no significant improvement in the total Grade Point Average (GPA) of the participants, although 75% of them made modest improvements in GPA. Research by Webb et al. (2005) reported that a counseling approach led to improvements in the academic and social competence of elementary and middle-school students.

In addition to group intervention, the development of academic success can be done through individual interventions. The meta-analysis of Casey (cited in Dimmitt et al., 2007) reported that student planning is implemented through application of several strategies. In appraisal, school counselors work with students to analyze and evaluate their abilities, interests, skills and achievement. Test information and other data are the basis for helping students develop immediate and long-range plans. In advisement, school counselors help students make decisions for future plans based on academic, career and personal/social data.

School counselors work with stakeholders, both inside and outside the school, as part of the comprehensive school counseling program. Through school, family and community collaboration, school counselors can access a vast array of support for student achievement and development that cannot be achieved by an individual, or a school, alone.

School counselors collaborate in many ways. Within the school, school counselors build effective teams by encouraging collaboration among students, teachers, administrators and school staff to work toward the common goals of equity, access and academic success for every student. Outside of school, school counselors create effective working relationships with parents, community members and community agencies, tapping into resources that may not be available at the school. By understanding and appreciating the contributions made by others in educating all children, school counselors build a sense of community, which serves as a platform to create an environment that encourages success for every student.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

School counselors have established their identity and clearly articulate and define the role that school counseling programs play in promoting student achievement and educational success. School counselors work with the express purpose of reducing the environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success. The purpose of guidance and counseling in schools is to play a role in the optimal development of student potential. Guidance and counseling use multiple services to develop student academic success. Individual student planning services aid learners in formulating and conducting activities related to planning of their future according to an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as an understanding of the opportunities available in their environment. In terms of development of student academic success in middle school, counselors facilitate students by helping them to understand their potential with interventions such as individual appraisal, helping students interpret their self-potential test results, and providing information on further study and work according to student potential. Individual planning service strategies can be implemented through classroom guidance, in both group and individual settings, and may involve other relevant stakeholders.

#### REFERENCES

- ASCA. (2012). *ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs*. Alexandria, VA: American School Counselor Association.
- Brown, D. & Trusty, J. (2005). School counselors, comprehensive school counseling programs, and academic achievement: Are school counselors promising more than they can deliver? *Professional School Counseling*, 9(1), 1–8.

- Cobia, D.C. & Henderson, D.A. (2003). *Handbook of school counseling*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Dahir, C.A. & Stone, C.B. (2012). *The transformed school counselor* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.
- Dimmitt, C., Carey, J.C. & Hatch, T. (2007). *Evidence-based school counseling: Making a difference with data-driven practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gysbers, N.C. & Henderson, P. (2012). *Developing and managing your school guidance and counseling program* (5th ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Johnson, E.S. & Smith, L. (2008). Implementation of response to intervention at middle school: Challenges and potential benefits. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(3), 46–52.
- RoI. (2003). *Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional [Law Number 20 Year 2003 regarding National Education System]*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Department of Law and Legislation, Republic of Indonesia.
- RoI. (2008). *Penataan pendidikan profesional konselor dan layanan bimbingan dan konseling dalam jalur pendidikan formal [Structuring professional education counselors and guidance and counseling services in the formal education path]*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Ministry of Education and Culture.
- RoI. (2008). *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 27 Tahun 2008 tentang Standar Kualifikasi Akademik dan Kompetensi Konselor [Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 27 Year 2008 regarding Academic Qualification Standards and Counselor Competencies]*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia.
- RoI. (2014). *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nomor 111 Tahun 2014 tentang Bimbingan dan Konseling Pada Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah [Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 111 of 2014 on Guidance and Counseling in Primary and Secondary Education]*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia.
- Shi, Q. & Steen, S. (2012). Using the Achieving Success Everyday (ASE) group model to promote self-esteem and academic achievement for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(1), 63–70.
- Sink, C. (2005). Fostering academic development and learning: Implications and recommendations for middle school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 9(2), 128–135.
- VanZandt, Z. & Hayslip, J. (2001). *Developing your school counseling program: A handbook for systemic planning*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Webb, L. & Brigman, G.A. (2007). Student success skills: A structured group intervention for school counselors. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 32(2), 190–201.
- Webb, L.D., Brigman, G.A. & Campbell, C. (2005). Linking school counselors and student success: A replication of the Student Success Skills approach targeting the academic and social competence of students. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(5), 407–413.
- York, T.T., Gibson, C. & Rankin, S. (2015). Defining and measuring academic success. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 20(5), 1–20.