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The Essential Role of Elementary School Teachers in Guidance and Counseling Services: Developing Student Empathy in Indonesia in Support of SDG 4

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Empathy is a fundamental social-emotional competency that supports students' personal development, positive interpersonal relationships, and inclusive learning environments. However, increasing cases of bullying, intolerance, and interpersonal conflicts among elementary school students indicate that empathy development remains a significant educational challenge in Indonesia. This study aims to examine the essential role of elementary school teachers in implementing guidance and counseling services to foster students' empathy while contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, particularly the promotion of quality and inclusive education. **Method:** A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the Arksey and O'Malley scoping review framework. Relevant studies published between 2014 and 2024 were identified through Garuda, Taylor & Francis, Open Knowledge Maps, and PubMed databases. Literature selection followed predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, while thematic analysis was conducted to synthesize evidence regarding teachers' roles and effective strategies for empathy development through guidance and counseling services. **Results:** The findings demonstrate that elementary school teachers play a pivotal role in integrating guidance and counseling into daily learning activities to enhance students' empathy. Effective strategies include experiential learning-based guidance programs, strengthening teacher-student relationships, collaboration with parents, bullying prevention initiatives, violence prevention education, and cognitive empathy enhancement. These approaches contribute to students' social-emotional development, reduce aggressive behavior, and support the creation of safe and inclusive school environments aligned with SDG 4. **Novelty:** Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on either teacher roles or empathy interventions separately, this review integrates current evidence to provide a comprehensive synthesis of elementary school teachers' guidance and counseling practices for empathy development within the Indonesian educational context. Furthermore, the study explicitly connects empathy-based guidance and counseling with the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education), offering practical recommendations for integrating empathy development into elementary education policies and classroom practices.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of student problems in elementary schools caused by a lack of empathy has become a serious concern in education in Indonesia. One of the most prominent issues is the increasing number of bullying cases in elementary schools. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission indicate that in 2018 there were 451 bullying cases reported in schools, of which approximately 36% occurred at the elementary school level (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia, 2019). The lack of empathy prevents perpetrators from understanding the feelings of their victims and recognizing the harmful consequences of their actions. In addition, conflicts among students frequently arise because of their inability to understand the perspectives of others. According to Wahyudi (2017), approximately 65% of conflicts among

elementary school students are associated with low empathy and poor emotional regulation.

Another concerning issue is the growing level of intolerance among elementary school students. A survey conducted by Setara Institute (2019) found that 10.39% of elementary school students demonstrated intolerant attitudes toward religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Low empathy also contributes to limited prosocial behavior among students. According to Anjani and Izzati (2018), only about 40% of elementary school students actively demonstrate concern for peers who need assistance, indicating that many students remain insufficiently responsive to the difficulties experienced by others.

In the learning context, limited empathy may hinder students' ability to collaborate effectively during group activities. Mulyawati et al. (2022) reported that students with lower levels of empathy experienced approximately 30% greater difficulty in completing collaborative learning tasks than students with higher empathy. Furthermore, empathy has also been associated with academic achievement. According to Suryanto (2020), students with higher levels of empathy tended to achieve better academic performance, with average scores approximately 15% higher than those of students with lower empathy. Similarly, Nurbaiti (2019) demonstrated that insufficient empathy was associated with increased bullying behavior among elementary school students.

Aggressive behavior is another common issue among students with low empathy. Sunawan et al. (2021) reported that approximately 55% of aggressive behavior cases among elementary school students were associated with low empathy. These findings suggest that empathy development is essential not only for fostering harmonious social relationships but also for reducing aggressive and antisocial behaviors that negatively affect both individuals and the school environment.

These phenomena demonstrate the importance of developing empathy from an early age, particularly during elementary education. Teachers, as the primary educational agents, play a crucial role in integrating empathy development through guidance and counseling services within daily learning activities. Strengthening students' empathy is expected to reduce various social and academic problems associated with low empathy while promoting a more supportive learning environment. Elementary education represents a critical stage for character formation, during which teachers are responsible not only for delivering academic instruction but also for facilitating students' social and emotional development. One of the most essential competencies to be nurtured during this period is empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings and perspectives of others (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983).

In Indonesia, the implementation of guidance and counseling services in elementary schools is regulated through several national policies. The primary legal foundation is Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 111 of 2014 concerning Guidance and Counseling Services in Primary and Secondary Education, which emphasizes that guidance and counseling constitute an integral component of the educational process and students' holistic development. Furthermore, Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 15 of 2018 concerning Teachers' Workload requires elementary school teachers to provide guidance and counseling services as part of their professional responsibilities. These regulations are further supported by the Operational Guidelines for Guidance and Counseling Services in Elementary Schools issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2016.

Meanwhile, the organization of school counseling services differs across countries. In the United States, the American School Counselor Association (2019) developed the ASCA National Model, which emphasizes four essential components of school counseling programs: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability. Similarly, countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have established comprehensive frameworks that promote students' well-being through integrated counseling services. These international approaches emphasize holistic student development and provide valuable references for strengthening elementary school guidance and counseling services in Indonesia.

Although counseling systems vary internationally, there is broad agreement that guidance and counseling services play an essential role in supporting students' academic, personal, social, and career development. In Indonesia, one of the major challenges remains the limited availability of professional school counselors at the elementary level, resulting in classroom teachers assuming dual responsibilities as educators and counselors. In contrast, several developed countries employ professional school counselors who provide more structured and comprehensive services (American School Counselor Association, 2019).

Given the increasing prevalence of bullying, intolerance, and interpersonal conflicts among elementary school students, the need for effective guidance and counseling services has become increasingly urgent. Consequently, elementary school teachers should possess adequate competencies to implement counseling services that effectively promote empathy development and students' social-emotional well-being.

This study therefore examines the urgency of the role of elementary school teachers in implementing guidance and counseling services in Indonesia and identifies effective strategies for fostering students' empathy. Specifically, the discussion addresses the concept of empathy, its significance during elementary education, and practical approaches that teachers can employ to integrate empathy-oriented guidance and counseling into daily classroom practices based on evidence from previous studies. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for elementary school teachers in developing empathetic and socially responsible students while supporting the objectives of Indonesia's National Education System and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a systematic literature review method, which is a comprehensive approach to analyzing and synthesizing existing literature related to a specific topic (Snyder, 2019). This method was chosen for its ability to integrate findings from various sources to provide a deep understanding of the role of elementary school teachers in guidance and counseling services, particularly in developing students' empathy in Indonesia.

Identifying the research question

This study focuses on the role of elementary school teachers in developing students' empathy through guidance and counseling services. Considering that empathy is an important asset in students' daily activities, it is crucial to develop its significance in their lives. However, not all educators at the elementary school level possess the skills to help students develop empathy, especially through guidance and counseling services. Therefore, the research question in this study is:

- 1)"What is the urgency of the role of elementary school teachers in implementing guidance and counseling services in Indonesia?"
- 2)"What are the effective strategies for elementary school teachers to develop students' empathy through guidance and counseling services?"

Searching for relevant literature

The search for literature was conducted through academic databases such as Garuda, Taylor and Francis, Open Knowledge Maps and PubMed. The articles used were published in both Indonesian and English, within the time frame of 2014-2024, to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the information. The Preferred reporting Items for Systematic Reviews for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-SR) was used as a guideline for the review process.

Selection process for studies

The selection process for studies uses predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The keywords used in the search include: "elementary school teacher", "guidance and counseling", "student empathy", "Indonesia", and their combinations using Boolean operators (AND/OR).

Mapping data

Data from selected articles are extracted into a table that includes information such as author, year of publication, research purpose, methodology, main findings, and implications. This process aids in organizing and analyzing information systematically.

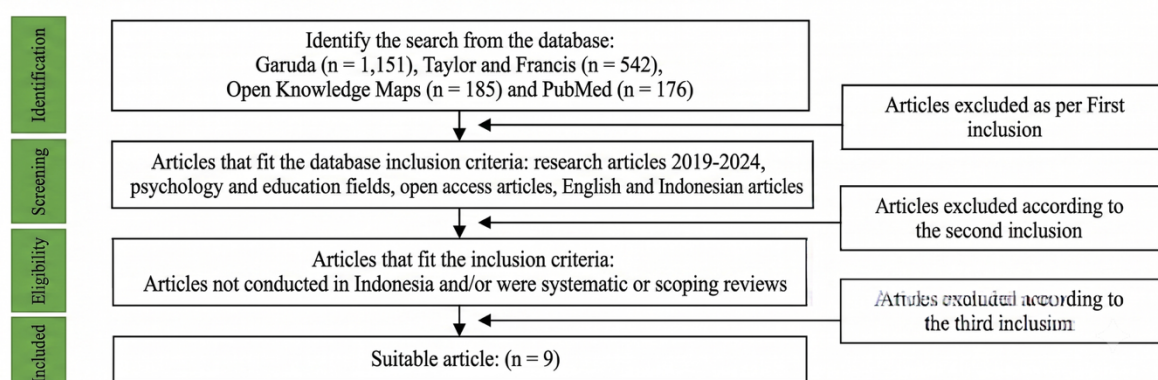


Figure 1. Mapping data

Analysis and synthesis of data

Thematic analysis is used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in data (Braun&Clarke, 2006). The emerging themes related to the role of teachers in guidance and counseling, as well as the development of students' empathy, were grouped and analyzed to answer the research questions.

Presentation of results

The results of the analysis are presented in the form of descriptive narratives accompanied by tables and diagrams to visualize the main findings. A synthesis of various literature sources will provide a comprehensive overview of the urgency of the role of elementary school teachers in guidance and counseling services and strategies for developing empathy among students in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The information obtained from the studies included in this systematic review was inputted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The data extraction process included various important aspects of each study, such as researcher details (author names), publication date, title of work, and research objectives. Additionally, methodological aspects such as study design, participant profiles, and analysis techniques were also noted. The main findings and recommendations proposed in each study were also part of the collected data. All of this information was then organized and presented in a table format for easier comparison and analysis.

Table 1. Result and discussion

No	Author's name, Year, Journal	Method	Result	Total Citations
1	Ambarwati, 2023, Garuda	Deskriptif Kualitatif	The Role of Class Teachers in the Implementation of Counseling Guidance to Increase Student Learning Motivation (Descriptive Study of Fifth Grade Students at Giyono State Elementary School, Jumo District, Temanggung Regency)	0
2	Oktrinita LR, 2020, Garuda	Qualitative Descriptive	The Role of Classroom Teachers in the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling in Character Building and Student Achievement Motivation at SD Negeri 8 Kranji	7
3	Levi KM, 2021, Taylor & Francis	Kuantitatif, Regretion	Mind the conflict: Empathy when coping with conflicts in the education sphere.	7
4	Ratu HNR, 2022, Garuda	Case Study	The Role of Classroom Teachers in the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling at SDN Serang 03	

Discussion

Based on the data presented in the table above, studies have been conducted that meet the inclusion criteria of researchers regarding the role of teachers, counseling guidance, and empathy at the elementary school level. These studies were conducted in various countries using various research methods, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Some studies focused on the role of classroom teachers in implementing counseling guidance to improve learning motivation and shape students' character. The results of the research showed that the role of classroom teachers as implementers of counseling guidance has been carried out well, although there are still

some obstacles such as diverse student characteristics and teachers' limited understanding of counseling services.

Other studies have discussed empathy in the context of education. Some research shows that empathy plays an important role in reducing bullying behavior and improving teacher-student relationships. One study found that 90% of teachers reported expressing empathy towards "the other party" involved in conflicts with them. Other research suggests that positive teacher-student relationships can predict students' emotional intelligence and empathy. Several studies have also examined the effectiveness of empathy-building programs. One study found that an experiential learning-based empathy counseling package was effective for fifth-grade elementary school students. Another study showed that students with high levels of empathy were more likely to actively defend bullying victims. Overall, these studies emphasize the importance of teachers' role in counseling and developing students' empathy at the elementary school level. They also highlight the need for education programs that focus on increasing empathy and preventing violence among elementary school students.

Based on the available data, the researcher will then answer the two research questions that have been formulated and divide the findings based on the categories of these research questions:

What is the urgency of the role of elementary school teachers in implementing guidance and counseling services in Indonesia.

The role of elementary school teachers in implementing guidance and counseling services in Indonesia is crucial and urgent. Several points that support this urgency are: Several studies (Ambarwati et al., 2023; Rochmah et al., 2020; Rahmah & Chudari, 2021) shown that the role of classroom teachers as implementers of guidance and counseling has been carried out and is very important for the development of students. Guidance and counseling services are needed to assist the development of students, increase learning motivation, and shape students' character (Ambarwati et al., 2023; Rochmah et al., 2020).

Classroom teachers have a multifunctional role as educators, mentors, and advisors in the context of guidance and counseling (Ambarwati et al., 2023). The implementation of guidance and counseling in elementary schools requires cooperation between teachers and parents to be carried out effectively (Rahmah & Chudari, 2021). Despite its importance, there are still obstacles in the implementation of guidance and counseling services, such as the diverse characteristics of students and the limited understanding of teachers about guidance and counseling services at the elementary school level (Ambarwati et al., 2023).

What is an effective strategy for elementary school teachers to develop empathy in students through guidance and counseling services?.

Based on the available data, there are several effective strategies that elementary school teachers can use to develop students' empathy through guidance and counseling services. These include implementing an experiential learning-based empathy enhancement guidance package, which has been proven effective for fifth-grade students (Andrianie et al., 2017). Strengthening positive teacher-student relationships, as this has been shown to predict students' emotional intelligence and empathy (Xiang et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2023).

Additionally, another strategy for developing empathy in elementary school students is through the implementation of a violence prevention education program that focuses

on empathy enhancement (Kang et al., 2020). Integrating empathy development into bullying prevention programs, as students with high levels of empathy are more likely to actively defend bullying victims (Hikmat et al., 2024). Focusing on developing cognitive empathy as a strategy for preventing cyberbullying (Mehari et al., 2023). Improving students' understanding and response to empathy as an effective strategy for addressing bullying issues in schools (Hikmat et al., 2024). Paying attention to gender differences in empathy development, as some studies have shown different effects of teacher-student relationships on empathy between boys and girls (Xiang et al., 2022).

Based on the analysis of various studies, it can be seen that the role of elementary school teachers in implementing guidance and counseling services in Indonesia is of utmost importance. Several studies have shown that the role of classroom teachers as implementers of guidance and counseling has been carried out and is crucial for the development of students (Ambarwati et al., 2023; Rochmah et al., 2020; Rahmah & Chudari, 2021). This finding is in line with Myrick (1987), who stated that classroom teachers play a key role in the implementation of guidance and counseling at the elementary school level because they have the most intense interaction with students.

Classroom teachers have a multifunctional role as educators, mentors, and advisors in the context of guidance and counselling (Ambarwati et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of the role of classroom teachers in providing comprehensive guidance and counseling services. In line with these findings, guidance and counseling services are necessary to support the development of students, enhance their motivation to learn, and shape their character (Rochmah et al., 2020). This demonstrates that guidance and counseling is not just about addressing problems, but also about optimizing students' potential.

Although the role of teachers in guidance and counseling is crucial, there are still some challenges in its implementation. Several obstacles such as diverse student characteristics and limited understanding of counseling services among primary school teachers (Ambarwati et al., 2023). This highlights the need for improving teachers' competencies in the field of guidance and counseling, as recommended by the American School Counselor Association (2019), which emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development for teachers involved in counseling services.

Rahmah and Chudari (2021) emphasize that the implementation of guidance and counseling in elementary schools requires cooperation between teachers and parents to be carried out effectively. This finding is in line with Bronfenbrenner (1979), who emphasized the importance of interactions between various systems in a child's development, including school and family. Therefore, strategies for involving parents in guidance and counseling programs need to be the focus of future development.

In the context of developing empathy among students through guidance and counseling services, several effective strategies have been identified from various studies. One proven strategy is the implementation of an empathy enhancement guidance package based on experiential learning for fifth-grade elementary school students (Andrianie et al., 2017). This finding supports Kolb's (2014) experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of concrete experiences in the learning process.

Positive teacher-student relationships have been proven to predict students' emotional intelligence and empathy (Xiang et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2023). This is in line with Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of a secure and positive relationship with an adult figure for a child's emotional development.

Therefore, guidance and counseling programs should facilitate the development of positive teacher-student relationships as a foundation for enhancing students' empathy. Hikmat et al. (2024) found that students with high levels of empathy tend to be more active in defending bullying victims. This finding highlights the importance of integrating empathy development into bullying prevention programs in elementary schools. It is also in line with the bullying intervention model developed by Olweus, which emphasizes the importance of developing social-emotional skills, including empathy, in reducing bullying behavior.

Mehari et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of focusing on the development of cognitive empathy as a strategy for preventing cyberbullying. This finding is interesting because it distinguishes between cognitive and affective empathy, as conceptualized by Davis (1983). This suggests that guidance and counseling programs need to consider various dimensions of empathy in their interventions.

Kang et al. (2020) recommend the development of violence prevention education programs that focus on increasing empathy. This recommendation aligns with the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020), which places empathy as one of the key skills in children's social-emotional development.

Xiang et al. (2022) discovered gender differences in the development of empathy through teacher-student relationships. This finding serves as a reminder of the importance of considering gender factors when designing and implementing guidance and counseling programs for empathy development. This is in line with the meta-analysis by Eisenberg and Lennon (1983), which showed gender differences in empathy, although the magnitude of the differences varied depending on the measurement methods used.

Based on the above, several implications and recommendations can be proposed for the development of guidance and counseling services in elementary schools, particularly in the context of developing students' empathy, including: Development of Teacher Competencies: Considering the importance of the role of classroom teachers in guidance and counseling, there is a need for a systematic professional development program to enhance their competencies in this field. This program should include an understanding of theories and practices in guidance and counseling, as well as specific strategies for developing students' empathy. Integration of Empathy Development in the Curriculum: The development of empathy needs to be integrated into the regular curriculum and guidance and counseling programs. This can be achieved through the implementation of an experiential learning-based guidance package, as proven effective in the research by Andrianie et al. (2017).

Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships: Considering the importance of teacher-student relationships in developing empathy, guidance and counseling programs need to incorporate strategies to facilitate positive relationships between teachers and students. Empathy-Based Bullying Prevention Program: The development of empathy needs to be integrated into bullying prevention programs in schools. This could include empathy skills training, modeling empathetic behavior by teachers, and creating a school climate that supports empathy. Gender-Based Approach: Empathy development programs need to consider gender differences in their design and implementation. This may involve different strategies for boys and girls, or a more gender-sensitive approach. Collaboration with Parents: Given the importance of collaboration between schools and parents, guidance and counseling programs need to develop strategies to involve parents in the development of student empathy. This

could include workshops for parents, regular communication about their child's empathy development, and involving parents in empathy development activities at school. Evaluation and Ongoing Research: There needs to be ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of guidance and counseling programs in developing student empathy. This will help in refining the program and developing evidence-based practices.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This systematic literature review confirms that elementary school teachers play a fundamental role in implementing guidance and counseling services that promote students' empathy and holistic development. The synthesized evidence demonstrates that empathy-oriented guidance and counseling contributes significantly to reducing bullying, improving interpersonal relationships, strengthening social-emotional competencies, and creating a more inclusive learning environment. The findings also highlight that integrating empathy development into classroom guidance practices supports the realization of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, particularly the promotion of quality, equitable, and inclusive education. **Implication:** The findings imply that educational stakeholders should strengthen teachers' competencies in guidance and counseling through continuous professional development and policy support. Schools should integrate empathy development into both curricular and extracurricular activities using evidence-based approaches such as experiential learning, positive teacher-student relationships, bullying prevention programs, and collaborative partnerships with parents. These efforts will contribute to improving students' social-emotional well-being while fostering sustainable educational quality. **Limitation:** This study is limited by its reliance on published literature included within selected academic databases and the inclusion criteria established during the review process. Consequently, relevant empirical evidence from unpublished studies, conference proceedings, or other regional databases may not have been captured. Furthermore, the study synthesizes previous findings without conducting direct empirical validation in elementary school settings. **Future Research:** Future studies are recommended to conduct empirical investigations examining the effectiveness of empathy-based guidance and counseling interventions across different educational contexts and cultural settings. Experimental and longitudinal research may provide stronger evidence regarding the long-term impact of guidance and counseling programs on students' empathy, social-emotional development, and academic outcomes. Future research may also explore the integration of digital counseling innovations and social-emotional learning frameworks to further support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Firdian Setiya Arinata contributed to the conceptualization, research design, systematic literature review, data curation, formal analysis, interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the original draft. **Awalya** contributed to the conceptual framework, supervision, validation, and critical review of the manuscript. **Eem Munawaroh** contributed to methodology development, validation, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript review. **Ashari Mahfud** contributed to literature screening, data curation, reference management, and manuscript editing. **Najma Sana Nadhirah Hilman** contributed to literature mapping, quality assessment of the included studies, data organization, and manuscript revision. **Adinuringtyas Herfi Rahmawati** contributed to project administration, data management, visualization, and manuscript editing. All authors have read, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

Artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology was used solely to support language refinement, grammar checking, and improvement of academic writing clarity during manuscript preparation. All conceptual development, literature selection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and final editorial decisions were conducted entirely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this manuscript.

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