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Building a Professional Counsellor Identity: The Mediating Role of Competence in the Relationship between Mind Skills and Professional Identity among School Counsellors

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Building a Professional Counsellor Identity: The Mediating Role of Competence in the Relationship between Mind Skills and Professional Identity among School Counsellors



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Abstract: This research examines competency as a mediator between mind skills and professional identity among school counsellors in North Kalimantan Province. This research employed a quantitative-correlational approach. The research respondents were 101 school counsellors. Data collection used the Mind Skills psychological scale ($\alpha = 0.951$), Competence ($\alpha = 0.951$), and Professional Identity ($\alpha = 0.961$), with very high reliability. The Sobel Test was 7.155 with a standard error of 0.091 and a p-value (sig) = 0.000 (<0.05). This shows that competence mediates between mind skills and professional identity.

Key Words: Competence; Mediating Analysis; Mind Skills; Professional Identity; School Counselors

INTRODUCTION

School counsellors play a crucial role in implementing school guidance and counselling services (Sagita, Neviyama, Afdal, Ifdil, and Marjohan, 2022). In implementing guidance and counselling services in schools, counsellors act as facilitators and motivators (Setiawan & Nurachman, 2019). A facilitator, in this context, refers to someone who provides professional assistance to address the problems faced by clients through counselling (Putri, Mudjiran, Nirwana, and Karneli, 2022). However, in Indonesia, counsellors are still perceived negatively by the public, due to a lack of understanding of the role and function of counsellors in schools (Pratama & Hidayah, 2019). Therefore, the counselling profession urgently supports student development through its roles and functions. However, it still faces challenges in the form of negative perceptions, so efforts are needed to improve public understanding.

Ibarra (1999) defines professional identity as a person's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences - Chen et al (2023, p.125). According to Gibson, Professional Identity is the perception of oneself as a professional who can integrate interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions Gibson et al (2023, p. 222). Meanwhile, Dogan et al (2018) define the professional identity of teachers as referring to a combination of individual self-understanding and society's views of counsellors as a profession. Chen et al, (2023, p. 125). As symbolic interactionists, identity is constructed from a sense of self, which develops through social interaction and communication in response to the environment. Ellis & Hogard, (2020, p. 78). The Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) defines professional identity as an understanding and knowledge of the history and philosophy, roles and functions, advocacy, professionalism and ethical standards of professional organisations and credentials. Parsons

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et al, (2014, p. 295). From this explanation, professional identity can be understood as a complete self-construction, encompassing personal and social dimensions, formed from a combination of beliefs, values, experiences, and internal motivations influenced by public perceptions of their profession. With a strong professional identity, counsellors clearly understand their functions and roles in schools and society. This clarity prevents counsellors from experiencing role ambiguity and overlap with other professions. A study comparing the perceptions of school principals and counsellors regarding the duties and responsibilities of school counsellors showed a mismatch (<52% agreement) regarding the activities that are the counsellor's responsibilities (Ruiz, Peters, & Sawyer, 2018). Another study in Malaysia stated a correlation between role conflict, role ambiguity, and counsellor competence (Arifin, Noah, Jaafar, & Zakaria, 2019). This study provides evidence that the counsellor's professional identity plays a role in clarifying the counsellor's role in schools.

Competence is a person's primary characteristic that impacts their performance, enabling them to become more effective or superior in a field of knowledge they have mastered (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). According to Weinert (2001), competence is the ability to think that an individual can overcome specific problems and the readiness, desire, and strong will to succeed and be responsible in various situations (Gerich, 2016). Meanwhile, Hanaysa defines competence as a deep understanding of a scientific field (Hanaysha et al., 2023). Sperry then emphasised competence is the ability to integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes demonstrated in professional performance. This competence can be evaluated based on professional standards and developed through professional training and reflection. (Sperry & Sperry, 2023). Counsellor competence can be understood as personal and professional characteristics that enable counsellors to carry out their roles and functions effectively. Counsellor competence consists of academic and professional competencies, which must be fully integrated (Radjah, 2018). Academic competence encompasses mastery of theoretical knowledge and skills. Professional competence emphasises applying this knowledge through field experience, training, and counselling skills in real-world contexts. Research shows that teacher and counsellor competence significantly influences the quality of learning and counselling services (Mu'arofah, Anwar, and Anggara, 2023; Albert Reba, Saud, Ari Saputra, and Ayu Pristanti, 2022). Research conducted by Nadhirah, Budiman, and Baiti (2024) also found that counsellor professional competence significantly influences the quality of guidance and counselling services in schools. Counsellors with good competence tend to meet service standards better, gain stakeholders' trust, and provide effective services. This indicates that counsellor competence is the primary foundation for the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in schools, encompassing service quality, intervention effectiveness, professionalism, and improving the quality of education.

In 2024, a survey was conducted among 101 school counsellors in North Kalimantan province. This survey measured the competence of school counsellors, tracing their personal development history over the past five years and their undergraduate and professional teacher education (PPG) backgrounds. The results showed that 74.3% of counsellors had moderate to low competence, 62.7% had participated in self-development programs irrelevant to their school counsellor duties, and 22.9% had never participated in self-development programs. A small proportion, 7.9%, had no educational background in guidance and counselling, and 58.4% had completed professional teacher education (Nurbatin, 2024). The survey data show that although most school counsellors have appropriate educational backgrounds and have completed professional teacher education, their competence remains in the moderate-low category. If not encouraged to improve competence through relevant self-development, it is feared that this could impact the quality of school guidance and counselling services. Efforts to improve competence need to be carried out continuously.

Counsellor professional development is a strategy for maintaining, developing, and updating competencies. Research shows that professional development, such as training, certification, and teaching experience, contributes to a counsellor's level of competence and self-perception as a professional counsellor (Farozin, 2019). Through her research, Nadhirah (2024) emphasised that professional development is essential for ensuring high-quality guidance and counselling services in schools that meet students' needs. Implementing professional development through peer groups is an effective option (Knight & Newby, 2019). Furthermore, it can be creatively designed and relevant to current issues to address students' needs (Minor & Duchac, 2023).

Mind skills are a series of thinking skills that counsellors need to have so that the counselling process runs effectively.(Jones, 2005). Mind skills can be interpreted as the counsellor's ability to manage thoughts to process information, interpret and reflect on thoughts, and revise thought processes.(Suwarjo, Irani & Sanyata, 2021). Research of Hanafi et al. (2022), this is in line with Suwarjo, who explained that mind skills are a form of metacognition, where a person has the ability to monitor and reflect on their thoughts during activities actively. Therefore, mind skills are a key competency required in the counselling process (Hidayah et al., 2022). Mind skills are applied according to Jones (2005). This will provide benefits for counsellors, including: first, counsellors will realise they have the ability to manage their thoughts, allowing them to measure and control their thoughts consciously. Second, this ability can be continuously developed over time. Third, through mastery of theory and ongoing practice, counsellors can develop mind skills to improve communication skills, which are essential in counselling. Counsellors use mind skills in the counselling process to understand, analyse, and respond effectively to situations. Mind skills can help counsellors solve problems to understand the root cause, avoid assumptions about clients, and think flexibly in dealing with diverse situations. Research conducted on guidance and counselling students at Yogyakarta State University showed that mind skills were quite good. However, their impact on the professionalism of prospective counsellors has not been tested (Suwarjo, Irani & Sanyata, 2021). Other research recommends mind skills training as an additional training program in counselling practicum courses (Hidayah, Ramli, Fauzan, Rahman, and Hanafi, 2022). This is considered necessary to train mind skills in higher-order thinking. Furthermore, mind skills can also be used as additional training for prospective counsellors in the supervision process. Other research indicates that counsellors who have received mind skills training experience significant changes in their conceptual understanding (Supa'at & Azmi, 2019). Therefore, through mind skills training, counsellors understand concepts and develop mind skills. When implemented in their lives, mind skills will influence how they think, communicate, and behave, reflecting the qualities of a professional counsellor.

Although competence is the primary foundation for the effectiveness and quality of guidance and counselling services in schools (Sperry & Sperry, 2023; Hanaysa et al., 2023), survey results indicate that the majority of school counsellors in North Kalimantan Province still fall within the medium and low categories (Nurbatin, 2024). This has the potential to weaken the professional identity of school counsellors, even though professional identity is crucial for clarifying the role of school counsellors (Chen et al., 2023; Gibson et al., 2023). This raises the question of whether competence mediates in explaining the relationship between mind skills and counsellor professional identity. Therefore, this study examines whether competence mediates the relationship between mind skills and professional identity.

METHOD

Research Design

This is a quantitative research with correlational design to examine whether competency mediates the relationship between mind skills and professional identity. Data analysis used multiple regression analysis, path analysis, and the Sobel test to test the significance of the mediation effect. This study was conducted from September to October 2024 in North Kalimantan Province. This study was conducted with due regard to research ethics principles. Before completing the scale, respondents were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, and the right to refuse or discontinue participation. Respondent participation was voluntary after respondents provided informed consent.

Participants

The population in this study consisted of 101 school counsellors, 63 female respondents and 38 male respondents. Ninety-one respondents' highest education was a bachelor's degree in guidance and counselling, five respondents' highest education was a non-guidance and counselling bachelor's degree,

two respondents' highest education was a master's degree in guidance and counselling, and three respondents' highest education was a non-guidance and counselling master's degree. The school counsellors were 35 years old, with an average length of service of 8 years and 6 months. The respondents of this study worked in high schools/vocational schools and state schools within the North Kalimantan Provincial Education and Culture Office.

Sampling Procedures

The research sample consisted of 101 respondents from all counsellors at state high schools (SMA/SMK) within the North Kalimantan Provincial Education and Culture Office. This study used the entire population as research subjects (total sampling). In this study, all respondents did not experience internet access issues, as schools without internet access do not yet have school counsellors.

Instrumentation

The measurements in this study used scales. The scales used were the Mind Skills Scale developed from Jones' theory (30 items), the Competency Scale developed from Spencer & Spencer's theory (35 items), and the Professional Identity Scale developed from Parsons & Zhang's theory (34 items). The scales were compiled based on indicators and descriptors that had been determined in the form of questions or statements. The questions or statements in the scale used question items that were favourable and unfavourable. Scoring in data processing on this instrument used a Likert scale (Table 1). The total score for each respondent indicated the school counsellor's mind skills, competencies, and professional identity, which were used as processed data for this study.

Table 1. Research Instrument Answer Scores

Favorable Item		Unfavorable Item	
Categories	Score	Categories	Score
SS (Very Suitable)	4	SS (Very Suitable)	1
S (Suitable)	3	S (Suitable)	2
TS (Not Suitable)	2	TS (Not Suitable)	3
STS (Very Inappropriate)	1	STS (Very Inappropriate)	4

The instrument validity test was used to assess content validity using expert judgment. The prepared instrument was first consulted with experts regarding its construction to ensure that the instrument was appropriate for the variables to be measured. The expert validation test results received input and suggestions, which led to more precise adjustments and improvements to the indicators and descriptors (Table 2). After being revised, the indicators and items on the mind skills, competency, and professional identity scales were found to be appropriate. An Aiken's V validity test was then conducted, with a value >0.70 indicating high validity.

Reliability testing was conducted in August - September 2024. The instrument was distributed to school counsellors in Aceh, Sumatra, West Java, Central Java, East Java, Bali, NTT, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Papua, and the Riau Islands. The reliability test was analysed using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in three scales of mind skills ($\alpha = 0.900$), competence ($\alpha = 0.951$), and professional identity ($\alpha = 0.961$), meaning that all three scales were declared very reliable (high reliability).

The feasibility test was conducted to ensure the instrument's validity, reliability, and appropriateness and to assess the quality of the items. Then the item score and the total score of all items were calculated. Then, it was analysed using the Pearson product-moment correlation, after which the total item correlation value was interpreted. The item is considered valid if the calculated $r \geq r$ table or (≥ 0.30). Conversely, the item is considered invalid if the calculated $r < r$ table, so it should be removed or corrected. The feasibility test results showed that the mind skills scale of 30 items, two items were not feasible because the calculated r was 0.28 and 0.23. Therefore, it was decided to discard the remaining 28 items. The competency scale and the professional identity scale, all items, were declared feasible.

Table 2. Example of a Competency Scale

No	Statement	F/ UF	Answer Options			
			STS	TS	S	SS
1	I explore the client's problems by asking open-ended questions.	F				
2	I can identify the client's perception of himself and his ideal image.	F				
3	I am used to asking open questions to clients.	F				
4	I have mastered cognitive restructuring techniques to help clients modify maladaptive thought patterns.	F				
5	I am able to reveal the emotions shown by the client during the counselling process.	F				
6	I am able to identify underlying irrational beliefs	F				
7	I am able to summarise the thoughts expressed by the client during the counselling process.	F				
8	I am able to help clients increase self-awareness	F				
9	I have difficulty conveying the client's statement again	UF				
10	I am able to encourage clients to take responsibility for their choices.	F				

Procedures

Data collection was conducted by providing respondents with a scale through Google Forms. The scale was assessed using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4. Respondents were asked to choose the answer that best suited them. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were given a consent form containing information about the research objectives, and the researcher guaranteed the confidentiality of the respondents' data and a statement of willingness to participate. To avoid bias and lack of seriousness in answering, item numbers were randomised, and item statements were not always made favourable, with unfavourable statements inserted so that respondents needed to be careful in answering.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the field were subjected to prerequisite tests (normality test, multicollinearity test, and heteroscedasticity test). The results met the requirements, so they continued to the hypothesis testing stage using inferential statistical analysis of simple linear regression, multiple regression, path analysis, and the Sobel Test. The data processing used SPSS 29 for IOS. In this study, path analysis decision-making was carried out by considering three leading indicators, namely the path coefficient value (β), significance value (p), and confidence interval (CI). Suppose $p < 0.05$ and the 95% confidence interval does not include zero. The magnitude of the influence is determined based on the coefficient value (β). The standard for making decisions for the Sobel Test is based on the criteria that if $z \geq 1.96$ ($p < 0.05$), then the mediation is significant, and if $z < 1.96$ ($p \geq 0.05$), the mediation is not significant.

RESULTS

Table 3 shown hypothesis testing uses regression analysis, using SPSS 29 for iOS. This test aims to determine whether competency mediates the relationship between mind skills and professional identity.

Table 3. Model fit and variance

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.913a	.834	.831	5,814
a. Predictors: (Constant), Competence, Mind Skills				

The regression test shows that the constructed model predicts the dependent variable significantly. The multiple correlation coefficient value $R = 0.913$ indicates a powerful relationship between mind skills and competencies, forming and strengthening professional identity. The coefficient of determination value $R^2 = 0.834$ indicates that mind skills and competency variables can explain 83.4% of the variance in the professional identity variable. Meanwhile, the remaining 16.7% explains that other factors outside mind skills and competencies influence professional identity. The adjusted R Square value of 0.831 indicates that after adjusting for the number of predictor variables, 83.1% of the variation in professional identity can be explained by mind skills and competencies. The Standard Error of the Estimate (SEE) value = 5.814 indicates that the size of the standard error of the prediction is relatively small, meaning it can provide predictions close to reality. Furthermore, to explain the relationship between the variables to be tested, the following Table 4.

Table 4. Simple linear regression test of mind skills on competence

Model	Coefficients		t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient		
	B	Std Error	Beta	
1	9,046	6,747		
(Constant)				
Mind Skills	1,208	.076	.849	15,982
a. Dependent Variable: Competence				<.001

The results of the simple linear regression analysis show that the variables Mind skills have a positive and significant influence on competence. The regression coefficient $B = 1.208$, $t = 15.982$, and p-value (sig) <0.001 indicate that an increase consistently follows an increase in mind skills in competence. The standardised coefficient value ($\beta = 0.849$) indicates that mind skills strongly contribute to forming competence. It can be concluded that mind skills are an important and dominant factor that plays a role in improving counsellor competence. The influence of mind skills and competence on professional identity is presented in the Table 5.

Table 5. Multiple regression test of mind skills and competencies on professional identity

Model	Coefficients		t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient		
	B	Std Error	Beta	
1	-2,149	5,567		
(Constant)				
Mind Skills	.256	.117	.171	2,192
Competence	.806	.082	.764	9,881
a. Dependent Variable: Professional Identity				.031
				<.001

The multiple regression analysis show that the mind skills variable has a positive and significant influence on professional identity, with a regression coefficient $B = 0.256$, $t = 2.192$, p-value (sig) = 0.031. This indicates that every 1 unit increase in mind skills will increase professional identity by 0.256 points. At the same time, the competency variable has a much stronger positive influence on professional identity with a regression coefficient value $B = 0.806$, $t = 9.881$ and p value (sig) = <0.001 , meaning that every one unit increase in competency will increase professional identity by 0.806 points. The standardised coefficient value shows that competency ($\beta = 0.764$) is a dominant predictor of professional identity compared to mind skills ($\beta = 0.171$). Thus, it can be concluded that both mind skills and competency contribute to forming a counsellor's professional identity, with competency as the most dominant factor. The magnitude of the direct and indirect influence between mind skills and professional identity can be explained through the following mediation path analysis as Figure 1.

The analysis shows that the mind skills variable directly influences professional identity by 0.171. This influence is relatively small, but mind skills also have an indirect influence through the competency variable. The magnitude of the indirect influence is obtained from the multiplication of the path coefficient of mind skills on competency with the path coefficient of competency on professional identity ($0.849 \times 0.764 = 0.649$) with a 95% confidence interval (0.471-0.827), which does not include the

number zero. This shows that the indirect influence of mind skills on professional identity through the competency variable is much greater. Thus, the total influence of mind skills on professional identity is $0.649 + 0.171 = 0.820$, with the most significant contribution coming from the competency mediation path.

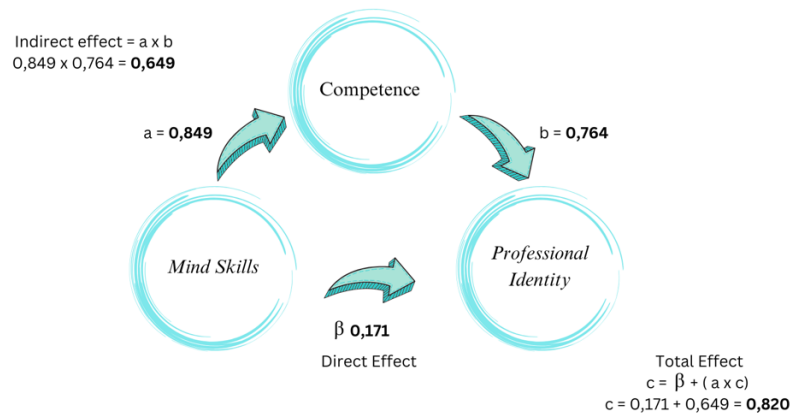


Figure 1. Path analysis showing direct and indirect effects of mind skills on professional identity through competence

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These findings confirm competence is crucial in linking mind skills to a counsellor's professional identity. This means that improving mind skills will only have an optimal impact on professional identity if accompanied by increased competence. This implies that counsellors' professional development strategies must focus on strengthening competence, as this variable is a dominant mediator and the most decisive factor in forming professional identity. To test the significance of this mediation effect, the following Sobel test results are presented in Figure 2.

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.849	Sobel test: 7.15509651	0.0906537	0
b	0.764	Aroian test: 7.13824909	0.09086766	0
s _a	0.076	Goodman test: 7.17206378	0.09043924	0
s _b	0.082	Reset all	Calculate	

Figure 2. Sobel Test Calculator Output

The results of the Sobel test indicate that the competency variable significantly mediates the relationship between mind skills and professional identity. The Sobel test value is 7.155 with a standard error of 0.091 and a p-value (sig) = 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that competency mediates mind skills towards professional identity.

DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that competence mediates the relationship between mind skills and professional identity. Competence is the dominant mediator and determining factor in forming a counsellor's professional identity.

Research results show that professional development in the form of training/practice experience to increase competence can enhance professional identity (Kirkbride, Livanou, & Waring, 2024). Gibson et al. (2023) stated that support and experience are important factors in developing a professional identity. Other findings indicate that educational programs (academic competencies and clinical experience) are crucial in developing professional identity for prospective international counsellors (Kuo & Washington, 2018). Furthermore, research in Indonesia, consistent with these findings, also shows that competency can enhance professional identity (Astuti, Suminar, & Rahmat, 2018; Wardani, Farida, & Yudha, 2019; Insani & Astuti, 2024). The findings of this study, along with previous research findings, align with the concepts presented by Spencer & Spencer (1993); Weinert (2001); Gerich (2016); Sperry & Sperry (2023); and CACREP, the counseling accreditation body that regulates counselor education curricula, states that competency is inherent in a person, demonstrated through skills, knowledge, and behaviors relevant to their profession. Competency is a standard the profession sets to demonstrate role suitability in carrying out duties as a professional counsellor. Increasing competency will impact the enhancement of a counsellor's professional identity.

Mind skills are thinking skills that counsellors use to manage their thoughts. (Jones, 2005) By mastering mind skills, counsellors will realise they can manage their thoughts, allowing them to measure and control them consciously. Over time, this ability can be continuously developed. Counsellors can develop mind skills to improve communication and rational decision-making through mastery of theory and ongoing practice. Hidayah et al. (2022) stated that mind skills influence the performance of prospective counsellors, meaning that mind skills training can be a relevant method for improving counsellor competence.

The research findings show that competence mediates the relationship between mind skills and professional identity. Mind skills help counsellors process information, make rational analyses, and act flexibly in the face of counselling dynamics. However, the most significant impact occurs when these mind skills are internalised into competencies, namely the ability to integrate knowledge, skills, and behaviours in counselling practice. These competencies strengthen professional identity because competent counsellors integrate knowledge, skills, and behaviours through professional performance. These findings emphasise the importance of competency development for enhancing counsellors' professional identity.

The results of this study can serve as a reference for educational institutions that provide counsellor education to integrate mind skills into training, curriculum, field practice experiences, and other ongoing professional development. This way, counsellors acquire technical skills and build comprehensive competencies through cognitive and reflective capacity. Furthermore, policymakers at the North Kalimantan Provincial Education and Culture Office are expected to use competency development as an indicator in evaluating guidance and counselling services in schools. This way, service quality is measured by the achievement of guidance and counselling service programs and by the quality of competency demonstrated by school counsellors.

This finding is consistent with previous findings that emphasise that competence can enhance professional identity (Kirkbride, Livanou, & Waring, 2024; Gibson et al., 2023; Kuo & Washington, 2018;). Hidayah et al. (2022) found that mind skills improve prospective counsellors' performance. Thus, this study confirms previous findings and offers a new perspective on how mind skills strengthen counsellors' professional identity through increased competence.

Study limitation

This study is limited by its correlational design. The instrument measures respondents' self-perceptions, which can potentially introduce bias. The study focused on a single province, making it impossible to generalise more broadly. Future research should employ qualitative, longitudinal, or experimental designs to understand the interplay of the variables better.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that competence is a crucial factor in shaping professional identity. The implications of these findings extend to the educational realm, where counsellor training curricula need to integrate mind skills into competency development. From a policy perspective, the findings provide a basis for decision-makers to make competency development a key indicator of school guidance and counselling service performance. Academically, this study expands the literature on professional identity by adding new insights into mind skills and competency as mediating variables, a rarely explored area. Therefore, this study contributes to the importance of competence and developing strategies for improving the quality of guidance and counselling services to address students' educational and developmental needs.

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