The influence of anxiety in supervision toward trainee counselors' competencies in Malaysia

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study is to investigate the association between anxiety and counseling competencies among Malaysian trainee counselors within supervision. Recently, counseling competencies have been highlighted in counselor education and training as it is one of the professional ethics to be obliged. However, there were a limited number of studies on how anxiety was affecting the competencies of counselors-in-training. Previous literature shows that most of the studies regarding this topic have been conducted more in Western countries than in Malaysia. Therefore, this study was implemented in public universities that offer bachelor counseling programs all across Malaysia. The respondents comprising n=204 final year trainee counselors undergo internship and n=62 counseling lecturers are supervisors. The result proves that anxiety has a negative significant correlation with counselor trainees' competencies r=-.399**. The result indicated that the anxiety in the model was a significant predictor of counseling competencies, R^2=.159, $F_{(1, 202)}$=38.180**, p<.000. The results also reported that anxiety had contributed significantly (β=-.285**, p<.000) on the Malaysian novice counselors' competency. This study provided supervisors and counselor educators with empirical data on the factor that may affect trainee counselors' competencies during the training. In contrast, this study only focuses on anxiety. There might be other factors that need to be considered in future studies. All these findings bring new perspectives in response to issues regarding trainee counselors to enable them to grow and remain responsive and beneficial to the educational needs of novice counselors.

1. Introduction

Guidance and counseling services in Malaysia today are rapidly expanding as the community's life becomes more challenging, difficult, and complex. As a result, more counselors are needed to meet the needs of the community. As of April 2019, there were 8573 counselors registered with the Malaysian Board of Counselors who had graduated and obtained a license (Arifin, 2020). Then the total number of registered counselors has risen to 9360 as of 2020 (KPWKM, 2021). Nonetheless, the number is still insufficient in comparison to the country's

population. To meet this need, several Malaysian universities that have been accredited by the Malaysian Board of Counselors offer graduate and postgraduate programs in the field of counseling to produce counselors. However, the counseling education and training programs should be responsible to provide future counselors with not only counseling knowledge and skills but also the competence and confidence required to ensure that effective and ethical services are provided to clients (ACA, 2014; KPWKM, 2015; CACREP, 2016).

Recently, the competency issue in supervision continues to be receiving attention and has been debated by scholars (Falender et al., 2021; Arifin, 2020; Watkins Jr, 2020; Bernard and Goodyear, 2019; Arifin et al., 2019a; Lambie et al., 2018; Lambie and Ascher, 2016; Falender, 2014; Gonsalvez and Crowe, 2014; Swank et al., 2012; Ridley et al., 2011). The attention has been increasing following the emphasis given by authoritative bodies such as the licensing board and professional associations on

the demand for more quality counseling services (Pelling, 2006), and the effort to renew the accreditation standard that implements competency requirements as the main core of trainee accreditation (Pelling, 2006; Gonsalvez and Crowe, 2014). Counseling competencies in counselor training and education have begun since the early 1940s through the skills evaluation process like verbal statements skills, followed by facilitative condition skills, and returning to verbal statement skills (Swank et al., 2012).

This is supported by Ridley et al. (2011), where the earliest competency that needs to be mastered by trainee counselors is related to the mastery of skills as put forth by counseling scholars. Counseling skills are the main competency that needs to be given attention among the trainee counselors undergoing internship training (Eryilmaz and Mutlu, 2017). Besides that, counseling skills also is regarded as the mainstay in the assistance process provided by the counselor to the client. In turn, the view contradicted that of McLeod (1992), that counseling competency is any quality, capability, or factor that enables a counselor to carry out their tasks and responsibilities effectively. Since then, researchers have begun to shift to the aspect of competency that needs to be mastered by trainee counselors in a much bigger scope. This is considering that the counselors will have to face clients from various backgrounds.

The competency component of trainee counselors must be the mainstay that becomes the basis of the supervision of the process as a guarantee of the client's welfare. Without competency, the counselor not only violates the ethics but also exposes the clients to adverse effects and further ruins the entire image and credibility of the counseling profession itself (Arifin et al., 2019b; ACA, 2014; Swank et al., 2012; Lambie and Ascher, 2016; Kabir, 2017; Bernard and Goodyear, 2019). To prevent this from happening, in Malaysia competency has been outlined as an act stated in the Counselor Ethics Code (KPWKM, 2011). In addition, KPWKM (2015) emphasized the importance of trainee counselors' competency in supervision which served as a requirement for their appointment as registered counselors in this country. This demonstrated the importance of the trainee counselor's competency in the supervisory process.

Despite that, this continues to pose a challenge to counselor educators and supervisors as the supervision process itself is rather complex. Therefore, to ensure the production of competent, professional, and qualified counselors, Malaysian public universities need to follow the guidelines of Counselor Training Standards and Qualifications (KPWKM, 2015). According to this guideline, every counseling student needs to undergo an internship and obtain supervision as the compulsory requirement for them to graduate. The counseling internship training is the post-practicum clinical experience supervised with the purpose of enabling students to examine closely and enhance and strengthen the application of knowledge and counseling skills at the professional training center. The internship must be carried out at a premise where the professional counseling service is conducted (KPWKM, 2015). The minimum period of the internship is 504 hours where a minimum period of 192 hours must be allocated to the relationship with the clients face-to-face through the supervision process.

2. Problem statement

Supervision is mandatory in the development of trainee counselors during the internship, but its definition can vary. According to Falender and Shafranske (2004), supervision is defined as a science-informed practice through a collaborative interpersonal process that assists supervisees in applying their knowledge, skills, and values effectively, that involves supervisory behaviors such as observation, evaluation, feedback, facilitation of supervisee self-assessment, and acquisition of knowledge and skills by instruction, modeling, and mutual problem-solving with the goal of facilitating the supervisee's personal and professional developments. Meanwhile, Bernard and Goodyear (2019) defined supervision as an evaluative relationship that develops over time between a more experienced member of a profession and novices in that same profession, involving the responsibility of supervisors for overseeing, guiding, monitoring, evaluating, and serving as a gatekeeper during the supervisory process, as well as safeguarding the welfare of the clients.

This definition is parallel with Kabir (2017), who asserted that supervision is a service in which a new counselor uses the services of another counselor who has more expertise and is more qualified to review their counseling practices with clients. Regardless of all of these definitions, it can be said that the purpose of counseling supervision, is to monitor counseling practices and to ensure that the trainee counselor conducts the practices that meet professional standards. Then also Kabir (2017) suggested that supervision is a professional process conducted to increase a counselor's self-awareness through self-learning and then to obtain ongoing professional outcomes. Well said, the most important purpose of supervision is to assist trainee counselors in their development, improve professional competence, and ensure accountability to clients and the public (Vassara and Papavassiliou-Alexiou, 2021). Moreover, through the supervision process, supervisees gain experience in counseling skills, strategies, and theories, and they improve themselves as competent counselors (Kabir, 2017; Bernard and Goodyear, 2019). It can be concluded that the supervision process will help and provide opportunities for trainee counselors to improve their competency through examination by the supervisor on their knowledge and skills with real clients in the real world.

However, trainee counselors might feel pressured in the supervision process since they depend on the supervisor's appraisal to pass. According to the clinical supervision literature, most counselors experience significant anxiety during their clinical training, particularly during their first supervised clinical internship/practicum (Bernard and Goodyear, 2019; Arifin et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2016; Falke et al., 2015; Kurtyilmaz, 2015; Tsai, 2015; Mansor and Yusoff, 2013; Larson, 1998). Trainee counselors are preoccupied with themselves, so they may become more anxious about their competencies. Anxiety is the result of a combination of normal psychophysiological reactions, such as apprehension, tension, and nervousness, in response to stressful situations that appear threatening or uncertain (Fitch and Marshall, 2002). These anxiety feelings are unavoidable for trainees during their training, and these experiences impede their professional development (Fulton and Cashwell, 2015), as well as their competencies.

Unfortunately, most of the studies on how anxiety was affecting trainee counselors' counseling competencies in supervision have been conducted in the Western context. In Malaysia, studies regarding this topic are very limited. Therefore, these study objectives are carried out to investigate the relationships between anxiety and trainee counselors' competency in the supervision process. Besides, the objective of this study is also to examine the influence of anxiety in supervision on the counseling competency of trainee counselors undergoing internships all across Malaysian public universities. Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Ha1: There is a significant relationship between anxiety and counseling competency among trainee counselors.
Ha2: There is an influence of anxiety on counseling competency among trainee counselors.

3. Theoretical framework

This research utilizes the Social Cognitive Model of Counselor Training (SCMCT) (Larson, 1998) as its foreground model. Based on SCMCT, a counseling session is a highly complex task. Therefore, the supervisory relationship must be given attention as an important platform to empower trainee counselors in handling their job skillfully. Larson (1998) believed that the supervisory relationship is highly helpful in developing the competency of the trainee counselor through "triadic reciprocal determination," which means that in supervision there are three critical elements that contribute to the competency of the trainee counselor and influence one another, namely (1) personal agency; (2) trainee counselor actions in the supervision process and counseling session; and (3) environmental learning factors (supervisory process and counseling session).

Personal agency is a construct that contributes to the feelings of competency and self-confidence as a counselor (Larson, 1998). There are several personal agency factors highlighted in SCMCT (Larson, 1998). One of them is the anxiety factor. According to this model, anxiety is an effective process that influences the effectiveness of the trainee counselor under supervision. Anxiety in SCMCT is translated as an element that may weaken or challenge the trainee counselor while under the supervision process. Larson (1998) stated that anxiety is a negative emotion that is formed during the supervision process and it may affect the level of effectiveness of the trainee counselors' actions with the way they think. The higher the level of anxiety experienced by the trainee counselor, the lower their ability to showcase their competency. However, Larson (1998) concurrently believed that with some guidance it can be beneficial as motivation for trainee counselors to repeat or even attempt new counseling actions. Therefore, based on the discussion above, this study proposes a conceptual framework as shown in Fig. 1.

4. Method

This study is a quantitative study that employs the correlational design to measure the relationship and influence between anxieties as an independent variable with the counseling competency of the trainee counselors as a dependent variable. According to Gay et al. (2011), correlational design entails gathering data to determine whether and to what extent a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. Furthermore, the correlation design can predict the value of the dependent variable when the value of the independent variable is known.

Independent variable   Dependent variable

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

The study respondents comprise 204 trainee counselors in the final year of their counseling program, paired with 62 counseling lecturers who supervised the trainee counselors. Respondents were chosen using a stratified random sampling technique from nine universities recognized by the Malaysian Board of Counselors and the Malaysian Qualification Accreditation Board all over Malaysia.

These universities namely Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), dan Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM). Meanwhile, two sets of instruments were used in this study to collect data. The first set of instruments was distributed to trainee counselors consisting of the Anticipatory Supervisee Anxiety Scale (ASAS), and the second set for supervising lecturers comprised the Counseling Competency Scale (CCS).

Table 1 is a summary of the ASAS instrument item. ASAS was developed by Ellis et al. (2008) and contains 28 items that measure trainee counselors' anxiety. The instrument employs a five-point Likert Scale, with 1=not at all, 3=mildly, 5=moderately true, 7=very true, and 9=completely true. This instrument obtains a Cronbach alpha reliability value of $\alpha=.97$ (Ellis et al., 2008). There are 26 negative items and 2 positive items (items 16 and 23) which had to be recorded before accumulating the total score. Meanwhile, Table 2 demonstrates the ASAS scoring. To obtain the overall ASAS score, all score items are required to be summed up, including the recorded score. The minimum ASAS score is 18, while the maximum is 252. The higher the score obtained, the higher the clarity of anxiety levels experienced by respondents.

Table 1: ASAS items

	Items
Negative	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
Positive	16, 23

Table 2: Scoring methods of ASAS

Scoring	Minimum score	Maximum score
The higher the score obtained, the higher the clarity of anxiety levels experienced by respondents	18	252

Table 3 shows the CCS used to measure the competence of trainee counselors in supervision by Swank et al. (2012). There were 32 items in the CCS with reliability values in the range of .92 (Swank et al., 2012). The CCS instrument employs a five-point Likert Scale, with 0=harmful, 2=below expectations, 4=near expectations, 6=meets expectations, and 8= exceeds expectations. Next, Table 4 shows the CCS scoring. In order to obtain the score of each CCS sub-scale, scores need to be calculated by adding up all items in every sub-scale. The minimum score for all competencies' sub-scale in CCS=0, while the maximum score for overall competencies=256; counseling skills=96; professional disposition=80; and professional behavior=80. Meanwhile, in Table 5, five category levels of competency for each CCS sub-scale are demonstrated–they are harmful; below expectation; near expectation; meets expectation; and exceeds expectation.

Table 3: Sub-scale of CCS items

Subscale	Items	No. of items
Counseling skills	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12	12
Professional disposition	13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22	10
Professional behavior	23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32	10
Total number of items		32

Table 4: Scoring methods for each CCS sub-scale

Scoring	Min	Max
Overall counseling competency score may be obtained by adding up all scores for items 1 to 32	0	256
Counseling skills subscale score may be obtained by adding up all scores for items 1 to 12	0	96
Professional disposition subscale score may be obtained by adding up all scores for items 13 to 22	0	80
Professional behavior sub-scale score may be obtained by adding up all scores for items 23 to 32	0	80

Table 5: CCS score interpretation

Level of competency	Overall competency	Counseling skills	Professional disposition	Professional behavior
Harmful	0	0	0	0
Below expectation	2 to 64	2 to 24	2 to 20	2 to 20
Near expectation	66 to 128	26 to 48	22 to 40	22 to 40
Meets expectation	130 to 192	50 to 72	42 to 60	42 to 60
Exceeds expectation	194 to 256	74 to 96	62 to 80	62 to 80

All the research instruments used are in English as it was developed overseas and must be translated into Bahasa Melayu. Every translated content of overseas instruments must be adapted to the local culture. In this research, the researcher used a 'back translation' procedure by Brislin (1970). Three-panel experts translated the English instruments into Bahasa Melayu, while three more panel experts then translated it back to English from Bahasa Melayu. All these panel expert translators in this study comprised skilled counseling lecturers and have a good mastery of both English and Bahasa Melayu. From a validity aspect, the researcher has obtained an agreement from four expert validity assessors to determine the validity of the instrument content for this research. Every expert will make an

assessment by checking and giving an agreement for every item involved. Every validity index used a 10-point Likert scale with 1=highly disagree and 10=highly agree. The coefficient value for ASAS and CCS content validity each stands at=.91 and .92.

Meanwhile, for the purpose of reliability, refer to Table 6 below regarding the Alpha Cronbach (α) value obtained in both analyses. The researcher conducted a pilot test on 30 UPSI trainee counselors who went through internship training and who were supervised by a supervising counseling lecturer there. The (α) value for ASAS=.98 and CCS=.96. In fact, in order to ensure that both instruments were true and stable, another reliability analysis used was performed on the actual study and the result shows that the (α) value for ASAS=.96 and CCS=.96. Based on the value obtained by ASAS and CCS instruments in Table 6 indicated that both possessed good and quality item, thus allowing this instrument to be applied in this research.

Table 6: Alpha Cronbach (α) value

Instrument	Pilot test (n=30)	Actual study (n=204)
ASAS	.98	.96
CSC	.96	.96

5. Results and discussion

In order to answer the developed research questions, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 23) to reveal the outcomes. The Pearson Correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between anxiety and trainee counselors' competency. Meanwhile, for the second hypothesis, simple linear regression is used to investigate whether or not anxiety could significantly predict a trainee counselor's counseling competency. Table 7 demonstrates the Pearson Correlation coefficients between the independent variable (anxiety) and the dependent variable (counselor trainee competencies). The finding of the analysis indicates that there was a significant negative correlation between anxiety and the counseling competence of trainee counselors (r=-.399**, p<.05). With this finding, Ha1 is accepted, indicating that the trainee counselors who experience high levels of anxiety tend to have low counseling competencies, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the strength of the relationship between anxiety and trainee counselor competence was at a moderate level.

Table 7: Correlation between anxiety and counseling competency

	Counseling competency (r)	Sig.
Anxiety	-.399**	.000
**: p<.05		

Based on Table 8, there was a simple linear regression conducted to investigate the influence of anxiety on the trainee counselors' counseling competency. Based on the results, the model summary of the multiple regression explained the value of R2=.159, showing that as much as 1.59% variability of anxiety contributes towards the competency of trainee counselors under supervision.

Table 8: Model summary of multiple regression

R	R2	Adjusted R2	Std. error of the estimate
.399a	.159	.155	24.45142
a: Predictors: (Constant), anxiety			

Meanwhile, in Table 9, the value F (1, 202) = 38.180 and the significant value is p<.05 indicating that anxiety was a significant predictor of the trainee counselors' counseling competencies.

Table 9: Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	33116.722	1	33116.722	38.180	.000b
Residual	175211.965	202	867.386		
Total	208328.686	203			
b: Predictors: (Constant), anxiety					

Referring to Table 10, the coefficient value of the multiple regression results for counseling competencies in the model (β=-.285, p<.05). Meanwhile, the t value of anxiety is significant (t=-6.179, p<.05). With this finding, it indicates that the trainee counselors' competencies were influenced by their anxiety during the supervision process. Therefore, Ha2 is accepted. The research model that can be built, thus, is as can be seen in Fig. 2.

Table 10: The coefficients of multiple regression

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	210.075	5.516		38.083	.000
Anxiety	-.285	.046	-.399	-6.179	.000

$$\hat{Y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1$$
$$\hat{Y}(Counseling\ competencies) = 210.075 + (-0.285)(anxiety)$$
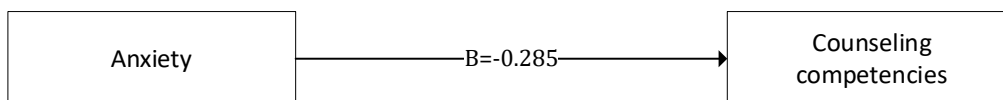

Fig. 2: Model of anxiety toward counseling competencies in supervision

Based on the results, it can be summarized that anxiety is one of the factors that is linked to, and influences, the competency of a trainee counselor. First of all, these results are in line with the study by Kurtyilmaz (2015) that pointed out that the majority of trainee counselors had stated their feelings when they were being supervised, including feeling confused, anxious, excited, curious, as well as fearful. Other than that, the results in this study are also consistent with the research by Falke et al. (2015) that most of the trainee counselors faced significant anxiety during the supervision process. The high level of anxiety experienced by trainee counselors was caused by their feeling of insecurity or extreme fear of the evaluation, as supervision is linked to professional practice. Other than that, their competence in handling counseling sessions would specifically be observed and evaluated (Kurtyilmaz, 2015; Falke et al., 2015). This is consistent with Kuo et al. (2016), stating that anxiety occurs due to the fact that supervision is a form of evaluation of the competency of trainee counselors. Supervisors have a responsibility to improve the competency of the trainee counselors to prepare them for a more effective and ethical service to the client through the evaluation (ACA, 2014; KPWKM, 2015; Falender and Shafranske, 2004). Therefore, they become overly anxious, worried that they might appear incompetent in front of their supervisors (Kurtyilmaz, 2015).

The findings of this research are also parallel with the research by Mansor and Yusoff (2013) on the exploration of trainee counselors' feelings and experiences at the Bachelor's Degree level. The novice counselors did their practicum and internship at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). In other words, this study focused on the new counselors' feelings and experiences throughout their practicum training and internship. One of the themes arisen was anxiety. Based on the findings, the majority of the trainee counselors will experience an anxiety phase before and after the first few weeks of their practicum and internship. Next, their level of anxiety will decrease in the next few weeks after they have had more time in their training process and have begun to adapt (Mansor and Yusoff, 2013). Besides that, the trainee counselors' anxiety often arises at the start of training and gradually diminishes the following week, depending on the learning that occurs during the supervisory process (Tsai, 2015; Mansor and Yusoff, 2013). A number of trainee counselors develop higher levels of anxiety caused by the lack of experience during the earlier phase (Bernard and Goodyear, 2019). Following that, trainee counselors went through a development phase that included mastery of trainee counselor competency aspects (Mansor and Yusoff, 2013).

As stated by Kuo et al. (2016), almost all trainee counselors experience high levels of anxiety at the beginning of their internship training as a common emotion felt by most counselors in the supervision process. The process of learning transition within the class to applying knowledge and skills in actual situations causes an eagerness at the same time as when anxiety builds within trainee counselors (Kuo et al., 2016). However, this feeling subsides when the trainee counselor begins to master their counseling competency while being under supervision. Furthermore, the results in this study are supported by the view of Bernard and Goodyear (2019), as the main source of anxiety among trainee counselors as they are unclear about the expectations and the assessment criteria in the supervision process. The findings of this study are also in line with the previous research findings, whereby the anxiety and fear experienced by a trainee counselor due to uncertainty about the supervisor's evaluation and the expectation of a negative matter happening in the supervisory process (Kurtyilmaz, 2015), as well as the trainee counselor is unclear of their role during the supervision (Arifin et al., 2019a; Olk and Friedlander, 1992). In the supervision process, the supervisor must play several roles such as evaluator, mentor, teacher, consultant, and advisor at any given time. Other than that, during the supervision, the trainee counselor tries to be recognized as competent, but at the same time, they are a student and expected to follow their supervisor's instructions and suggestions. In turn, a trainee counselor is unsure regarding his/her role. Every role will be represented by power and different intervention methods. There was a gap in authority and power between the supervisor and trainee. In order to fulfill this responsibility as an evaluator, the supervisor will possess more power. The difference in the source of power in the supervisory relationship causes anxiety among the trainee counselors (Kabir, 2017).

This situation may influence supervisory sessions where the trainee counselors are unable to display their true abilities and finally miss the opportunity to be guided by the supervisor. Therefore, the supervisor should prepare a clear guidelines for the trainee counselors so that they are clear on the roles of the supervisors and their duties (Kabir, 2017). Other than that, Kurtyilmaz (2015) stated that support and guidance from the supervisor may also help the trainee counselor to be more confident when under supervision, thus reducing their anxiety. High levels of anxiety may affect the learning process for trainee counselors under supervision (Bernard and Goodyear, 2019). When the trainee counselor feels anxious, the supervisory relationship will be affected (Kabir, 2017; Bernard and Goodyear, 2019). The anxiety factor in the supervisory relationship must be given attention to see how to reduce their anxiety. The trainee counselor will feel at ease when they obtain support and guidance from the supervisor on their actions during the supervision and facilitate the reduction of anxiety (Kurtyilmaz, 2015). Furthermore, Bernard and Goodyear (2019) described anxiety in supervision as both common and multifaceted with anxiety affecting learning, presentation, and the quality of supervisee-supervisor relations.

Finally, the findings of this study support the SCMCT model (Larson, 1998), which states that negative emotions such as anxiety can affect the effectiveness of trainee counselors' actions and hinder trainee counselors' competency to develop the skills they learned in supervision. As stated by Bernard and Goodyear (2019), there are three effects of anxiety on a trainee counselor, namely (1) hindrance to learning; (2) blocking the ability to showcase their performance; and (3) limiting their interaction with the supervisor. Research has shown that a perceived lack of professional support or too much negative feedback may lead to lower anxiety, counseling self-efficacy, increased stress, burnout, feelings of aloneness, job dissatisfaction, and even the actual decline in counseling skills (Daniels and Larson, 2001). Nonetheless, the SCMCT model (Larson, 1998) believed that a little anxiety, it can serve as a motivator for trainee counselors to repeat or try new counseling actions. According to Falke et al. (2015), trainee counselors' weaknesses and anxiety are not a problem that needs to be solved, but they rather require constant attention. Anxiety can also be used by trainee counselors to identify problems and help them achieve higher levels of competency (Tsai, 2015). Anxiety may be overcome if the trainee counselor adopts a more open attitude towards challenges or criticism from supervisors while handling counseling sessions (Bernard and Goodyear, 2019).

6. Conclusion

Although anxiety may bring about a negative effect, at the same time it allows the trainee counselor to learn much more, thus developing the supervisory process. Overall, this research finding may be of beneficial information to trainee counselors, where their competency is crucial in ensuring that the counseling services offered will not be detrimental to the client. This matter is clear just as emphasized by the Counseling Ethics Code (KPWKM, 2011), that the counseling competency aspect remains the basic aspect for the trainee counselor. Other than that, the findings of this study may help trainee counselors identify clearly the factors that may influence the formation and development of their competency. Next, the aim is to master the positing factors and overcome negative factors well so that the learning and teaching process during supervision is not impacted. Most importantly, all these findings could provide future research directions to improve the level of competencies among counselor educators and supervisors during the supervision process. There are several limitations to this study, which could serve as avenues for future research. Firstly, this study is limited as it is focused on trainee counselors in public universities in Malaysia. Therefore, for future research, it is suggested that this counseling competency study may be implemented among trainee counselors by considering private universities as well. As this is a quantitative study, a qualitative study would be conducted to obtain a detailed response from the trainee counselor and supervisor in future studies. For a deeper understanding of the feelings and thoughts counselor trainees experience in their professional developmental process, longitudinal studies that include pre-professional and professional life can also be conducted.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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