

## Gender Differences in Brunei Upper Secondary School Students' Attitudes Toward Guidance and Counseling Services

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**Abstract:** The survey assessed the attitudes of 282 randomly selected upper secondary school students (149 males and 133 females) toward guidance and counseling services in Brunei Darussalam. Both genders had positive attitudes toward guidance and counseling. The younger the students were the more they were affected by factors influencing attitudes to guidance and counseling. The findings suggested that guidance and counseling needs to be consolidated in Brunei schools if it is to greatly benefit all students. Large-scale mixed-methods research was recommended to gain more information and solutions to the problem. This is because guidance and counseling is an important intervention in helping students with academic and personal problems in schools.

**Key words:** Guidance, counseling, attitudes, gender differences, Brunei

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### INTRODUCTION

Most research on Brunei secondary school students has tended to focus on learning difficulties resulting mainly from disability (Bradshaw and Mundia, 2005, 2006; Mundia, 2006, 2010a-c; Haq and Mundia, 2011, 2012; Tait and Mundia, 2012; Mundia, 2012a; Tait *et al.*, 2014a, b; Keaney and Mundia, 2014). These studies pointed out the need to equip teachers with requisite skills for addressing problems faced by students with high support needs. Acting upon findings of these and other studies, a number of educational reforms were implemented that brought changes to the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment strategies in Brunei government schools (Ministry of Education, 1997, 1998, 2007; Mundia, 2007, 2009, 2010c). In addition, teacher education was also innovated to ensure the provision of quality education (Mundia, 2011a, 2012b-d, 2013; Haq and Mundia, 2012; Tait and Mundia, 2014). Furthermore, the strategies for evaluating students were also modified to accommodate the curriculum and teaching changes (Mundia, 2010d).

**Career guidance and counselling:** The Brunei government considers career guidance and counselling as important aspects of the education system. To demonstrate this, the Ministry of Education has created a Career Guidance and Counselling Unit to deal with matters pertaining to counselling of students in schools. Despite these developments, research on career education has not been accorded top priority. Previous research indicates that secondary school students need to be

guided and counselled on careers early so that they choose subjects carefully consistent with their career interests (Mundia, 1998). Overall, the development of human resources for a productive workforce is considered important in Brunei tertiary education institutions (Mundia, 2012e). Power in 1999 argues that guidance and counselling are processes of personal development in education that involve the students themselves. Crow and Crow (1979) and Nayak (1997), define guidance as assistance made available by competent counselors to an individual of any age to help them direct their own lives, develop their opinions or points of view, make their own decisions and carry their own burdens. On the side note, guidance is defined as "that aspect of educational program which is concerned especially with helping the pupil to become adjusted to his present situation and to plan his future in the line with his interests, abilities and social needs." (Kochhar, 1984). According to McLeod (2007), counseling is not something done to one person by someone else, but rather, it is an interaction between two people. In this way, guidance and counselling lead to growing up of a student in self-management skills (Giddens, 1984).

**Objectives of the study:** The overall purpose of the present study was to identify and determine the attitudes of students towards guidance and counseling services in the upper secondary schools in Brunei. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate how these students' attitudes were influenced by gender. Apart from that the study also aimed to explore the students' attitudes to guidance and

counselling by age. This study mainly focused on students from year 10, known as upper secondary level in Brunei.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Briefly described below are the design, sample, instruments, data analysis and procedures used in carrying out the present study.

**Design:** The study was carried out using the field survey method. With this approach it was possible to involve many secondary school students in the study.

**Sample:** Participants in the study were drawn using the simple random selection procedure from Year 10 students in Brunei-Muara district. Initially, a total of 320 questionnaires were distributed to chosen students but only 282 submitted properly completed and usable protocols. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Instruments:** Previous research indicates that collecting research data in Brunei can be a problem due to English language difficulties (Mundia and Bakar, 2010; Mundia, 2011b) I used two instruments to collect the required research data and these were the researcher-constructed demographical questionnaires that collected bio-data; Attitude towards Counseling and Guidance services scale (ATC) and Factors Influencing Attitudes (FIA) scale adapted from Hartini in 2008. The ATC is a 30-item (5-point Likert-type scale) that measures students' attitude based on six dimensions such as enjoyment, anxiety, importance, interest, motivation and confidence in Guidance and Counseling. Similarly, the FIA Part 1 (9 items) and the FIA Part 2 (13 items) are all 5-point Likert-type scales measuring the factors influencing attitudes based on the professional characteristics and qualities of the counselors. The descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the three rating inventories are presented in Table 2.

The low correlations in Table 3 show that the three scales did not duplicate each other very much and therefore had good discriminant validity.

**Data analysis:** The quantitative data were analyzed by both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean standard error of the mean, standard deviation and quartiles) and inferential statistics (t-tests for independent samples incorporating ANCOVA F, Pearson's correlations and One-Way ANOVA).

Table 1: Demographic information (N = 282)

Groups	Frequencies	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Males	149	52.8
Females	133	47.2
<b>Age</b>		
13-14 years	7	2.5
15-16 years	108	38.3
17-18 years	167	59.2
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	266	94.3
Chinese	8	2.8
Iban	4	1.4
Dusun	1	0.4
Philippines	1	0.4
Indonesia	1	0.4
Bisaya	1	0.4

Table 2: Reliability of the data collection instruments (N = 282)

Scale	Items	Mean	SE mean	SD	Alpha
ATC	30	85.18	0.396	6.648	0.552
FIA1	9	33.15	0.292	4.909	0.617
FIA2	13	50.67	0.479	8.045	0.864

ATC = Attitude Towards Counseling; FIA1 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 1); FIA2 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 2)

Table 3: Convergence and discriminant validity of the instruments (N = 282)

Scales	1	2	3
ATC	-0.014	1	
FIA1	-0.014	-0.046	1
FIA2	-0.014	-0.046	0.592**

ATC = Attitude Towards Counseling; FIA1 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 1); FIA2 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 2); \*\*p<0.001 (two-tailed)

**Procedures:** Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the government of Brunei (Ministry of Education) and school authorities. Prior to collecting the data, the participants were informed about the purpose, objectives of the study and ethical requirements for participating in the study. No deception was involved in the study. The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. With regards to language problems, the meaning of difficult English words, sentences and phrases on the instruments were verbally explained to the respondents. The instruments were written in simple English and did not need to be translated into Bahasa Melayu (Brunei's mother tongue and official language).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study are presented as according to the main objectives of the investigation, namely; the attitude of students towards guidance and counseling services by gender and age.

Comparison of the students' scores on the three scales by gender: As reported in Table 4, the two genders' scores differed significantly on all the three

Table 4: Means, standard deviations and t-values by gender (N = 282)

Factors/scales	Male (n = 149)		Female (n = 133)		ANCOVA F	t (df = 280)	p (2-tailed)	ES
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
ATC	86.48	7.365	83.73	5.408	5.357	3.534	0.000**	0.43
FIA1	32.20	5.191	34.21	4.352	3.702	(3.499)	0.001**	0.42
FIA2	48.44	8.701	53.17	6.403	9.457	(5.146)	0.000**	0.86

ATC = Attitude Towards Counseling; FIA1 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 1); FIA2 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 2); ES = Effect Size; \*\*p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Table 5: Means, standard deviation and t-values by age-groups (N = 282)

Factors/scales	Aged 13-14 (n= 7)	Aged 15-16 (n= 108)	Aged 17-18 (n= 167)	f (df = 2; 281)	p (2-tailed)	Eta
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)			
ATC	82.86 (3.485)	85.6 (6.475)	85.01 (6.853)	0.701	0.497	0.005
FIA1	35.86 (3.436)	32.27 (5.287)	33.6 (4.618)	3.587	0.029*	0.025
FIA2	51.71 (5.529)	49.09 (9.383)	51.64 (7.007)	3.408	0.035*	0.024

ATC = Attitude towards counseling; FIA1 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 1); FIA2 = Factors Influencing Attitudes (part 2); \*p<0.05 (two-tailed)

scales. Males scored much higher than their female peers on the ATC scale. However, females scored significantly higher on both parts of the FIA scales than their male counterparts. All the three mean difference scores were associated with high effect size values.

**Comparison of the students' scores on the three scales by age-groups:** No significant difference was obtained on the ATC scale. However, the three age-groups differed significantly on both of the FIA subscales as indicated in Table 5. For both of these, the younger students in age-group 13-14 scored much higher than those in the other two age-groups.

The present study found a significant positive attitude of upper secondary school students towards guidance and counseling services in Brunei. This finding supports the outcome of the study by Musgrove in 1973 who discovered a positive and favorable attitude of high school students towards the guidance office and services. Nonetheless, this finding is in contrast with Ubana (2008) who found out negative attitude of secondary school students in Yakurr (rural secondary school, Cross River State) towards guidance and counseling services.

In addition, evidence based from the present study reveals that male students are favorably disposed to school guidance and counseling services than their female counterparts. This is an interesting finding which reflects masculinity. It is surprising to see the result in that male students are mostly rigid and reserved in their relationships, hence, reduce their ability to neither interact often with the counselors nor seek their services. Yet, male students are significantly having higher positive attitudes in the guidance and counseling services than female students who are naturally good in interpersonal relationship, self-disclosure and openness than male students.

The present study indicates the positive attitudes of males towards counseling and guidance services are not influenced by the professional characteristics and qualities of the counselors. However, female students' attitudes towards counseling and guidance services are actually influenced by the professional characteristics and qualities of the counselors and that is why their positive attitudes are lower than males. Having said that males students seemed to be very concerned with the services provided by their counselors rather than concerning and thinking much about their counselor's characteristics. On the other side, female students are actually concerned with their counselor's characteristics that it is significantly influenced their attitudes towards guidance and counseling services.

The possible reason for the differences in the positive attitude could be that upper secondary school students are already aware of the functions of guidance and counseling services and are also motivated by the guidance counselors on the need to utilize the services.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings discussed above the following conclusions can be drawn from the present study.

- Upper secondary school students in Brunei have positive attitude towards guidance and counseling services
- Males show high positive attitude towards guidance and counseling services than females. On the flip side, females revealed high positive attitude towards factors affecting their attitude and this focuses on the professional characteristics and qualities of the counselors

- Age has no effect on the ATC but is affected by factors influencing attitudes

Last but not least, the school counselor is responsible to be prepared in every way to impress each and everyone in the school that includes the principal, teachers and also parents who are considered as both primary and secondary agents. This can be done by exposing and promoting the needs and services of guidance and counseling to these important agents as for examples the time for guidance and counseling should be scheduled in the school timetable as this allows for planned guidance and counseling services. Another example would be non-stop efforts should be made to persuade students and parents to take guidance and counseling seriously. Last but not least, the role of the teacher-counselors should be clearly spelt-out so that both of them can give mutual cooperation between each other. This is reflected to what Bulus (2001) believed that both principals and teachers misconceived the counsellor's status. Hence, this often creates conflict between them whereby in most cases teachers who believe in the need for counsellors in the school may see no reason why there should be full time counsellors in schools. The counsellors should receive supports from the teachers to serve the students the needs of the guidance and counselling services. The main reason for the existence of these important agents is because they are the one who actually can grasp the role of counselors at home and within the school system. Therefore, students' positive attitude can be enhanced and developed more towards guidance and counseling services.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

The implications of these findings are that females need to be provided with adequate exposure or awareness of the guidance and counseling services. This can be done by providing workshops, seminars and exposing students to medias such as television, radio and newspapers. In other words, female students should be more motivated through all those exposures on the need to participate in guidance and counseling services for proper self and academic adjustment and development of healthy and positive attitude.

### **LIMITATIONS**

The present study has two limitations. First, as a survey, the results cannot establish cause-effect relationships in variables investigated. Second, a

qualitative interview component is missing but was necessary to triangulate findings from the quantitative survey. Lastly, attitude of students may change over a period of time. Therefore, the present findings only apply to year 10 students who were involved in this study. Further studies are recommended to evaluate the students' attitude toward guidance and counselling services in Brunei.

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