

# The Impact of Supervisory Styles on Satisfaction of Undergraduate Counselling Interns in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Clinical experience in counsellor education would not be possible without the kind support of our site supervisors. Day-to-day guidance, advice, and real understanding given to undergraduate students are essential in helping students develop and grow into competent counsellors during their internships. Supervisors play different roles and styles during the supervision process. Thus, this study aimed to assess student perceptions of counsellors' supervisory styles and examine what impact those styles have on the satisfaction of undergraduate counselling interns. This study is quantitative, where a total of 138 counselling interns were selected from four public universities in Malaysia. The results showed that in the Malaysian backdrop, four supervisory styles have a major relationship with supervisory satisfaction, and they are as follows: directive teacher, supportive teacher, counsellor, and delegating colleague (consultant) styles respectively. This study has also filled the knowledge gap existing in the realm of counselling supervisory styles. Furthermore, the newly modified instruments of supervisory styles inventory may be applied to the undergraduate level interns. In practice, this helps supervisors to enhance the supervision process. The undergraduate counselling interns mostly are satisfied with supportive supervisory style. In this regard, supervisors or counsellor educators may find the most functional and appropriate style that suits their interns.

**Keywords:** principal supervisory, satisfaction, supervisor, supervisory style, undergraduate counselling interns

## 1. Introduction

Counselling internship is seen as one of the components in public universities' counselling degree courses in Malaysia. The internship is needed to improve and strengthen the students' knowledge and counselling skills in professional training. As defined by the Board of Counselors, counselling practicum/internship is a clinical experience being supervised and aimed to enable counselling interns to build and expand necessary skills of counselling and integrate professional knowledge (Education and Technical Training Committee and Board of Counselors, 2003 as cited in Aman and Ahmad (2010). As given by Fullen et al. (2020), an internship is one of three components that must be met to qualify a

person to be a registered counsellor. It shows that the internship component is seen as an integral component of training in counselling services.

During the internship, the students will get assistance from their supervisor either from their placement agency or from the faculty supervisor (Marks et al., 2018). In Malaysia, students who undergo internship will have their lecturers as their supervisors. The lecturer is responsible for carrying most of the supervision process during internship/practicum. Walker et al. (2017) stated that supervisors are "guardians" of the skill training process. Therefore, supervisors play a significant role in developing novice counsellors or supervisees during internship/practicum. Lack of supervision from a supervisor can bring adverse effects and be harmful to clients (Wheeler & Richards, 2007). Those who received adequate supervision from their supervisors are believed to increase their self-confidence in working with a broader variety of clients and can utilize different counselling techniques after they have completed their degree programs. Hence, to promote self-efficacy among counsellors-in-training is crucial in the counsellor training program (Jaafar et al., 2011).

In addition, supervisee enhancement during an internship will bring positive results to therapy and counselling services, while supporting them indirectly without causing any detriment (Spielberger, 2020). It is important to ensure that ideas are mutually acceptable and the necessary relations-based factors are placed to create and sustain a successful supervisory process (Beinart, 2014). In this study, the researcher concentrates on supervisory methods applied by supervisors during the supervisory phase while overseeing their interns. This is due to the varying forms, viewpoints and roles undertaken by supervisors, according to supervision theorists and researchers (Beinart, 2014; Mana et al., 2004). As stated by Dow et al. (2009), a supervisory style is an integral part of the supervision process. The study of supervisory styles is needed for the benefit of supervisions process and the counselling profession (Alis et al., 2014). In relation to supervisory styles, varying supervisory manners and forms give rise to differing acts, thoughts, and supervisees' behaviour during supervision (Ellis, 2017). Furthermore, when the supervisor's style clashes with the supervisee, the supervisee is observed to isolate himself or herself from the supervisor.

Hence, supervisory styles are necessary variables for supervisory efficiency to be examined. If not attended to, the supervisee may experience inner dissonance (Bogo et al., 2011). This could lead to an awkward situation, which could adversely affect both parties. In counselling supervision in Malaysia, apart from studying important aspects in the supervision process like the theories in the supervision process (Ghazali et al, 2015) or the roles of trainee counsellors (Arifin et al., 2019), another essential component is the supervisory style of a supervisor. To enhance counselling training in Malaysia, this study aims to recognize supervisory styles common to counselling interns in the country. This research also explores the effect of supervisory styles on the level of satisfaction of the interns.

## **1.1 Supervisory Style**

Apart from advising interns, supervisors need to also consider the types of approaches adopted in counselling supervision. Although supervisors are endowed with their own trademark styles, they need to be cognizant of the preferred style for their interns. Adeyemi (2010) suggested that a guideline style would be best suited for interns with the lowest readiness standard, the encouraging style manner of a teacher is best suited for students with a low level of readiness, the counsellor style is better suited for interns with moderate readiness, and the consultant style is more suitable for interns with a high level of readiness. They cannot, thus, necessarily adopt supervisory styles without intent. Instead, they must balance the means and manner of supervision styles with the readiness of the interns. If the styles meet the needs of the interns, the process would be equally satisfying to them.

Supervision theorists and researchers have long accepted that supervisors operate in varying ways, techniques and tasks with their trainees (Hart & Nance, 2003; Morgan & Sprenkle, 2007). Not only can these supervisory styles support the development of the trainees, they can also affect the supervisory process and outcome variables (Fernando & Hulse-Killacky, 2005). Ghazali et al. (2018) previously examined the fact that supervisory styles (attractive, interpersonally sensitive, and task-oriented) contributed to supervisory satisfaction.

Shaffer and Friedlander (2017) defined supervisory style as the different approaches that supervisors use, combining their unique manner in responding to trainees. Tangen and Borders (2016) utilized three supervisory styles: attractive, interpersonally sensitive, and task-oriented. Attractive

supervisory styles refer to supervisors who consider themselves 'warm, supportive, friendly, and open' (flexible). Interpersonally sensitive styles refer to supervisors who consider themselves invested, committed, therapeutic, and perceptive. Task-oriented supervisory styles refer to supervisors who consider themselves goal-oriented, thorough, focused, practical, and structured.

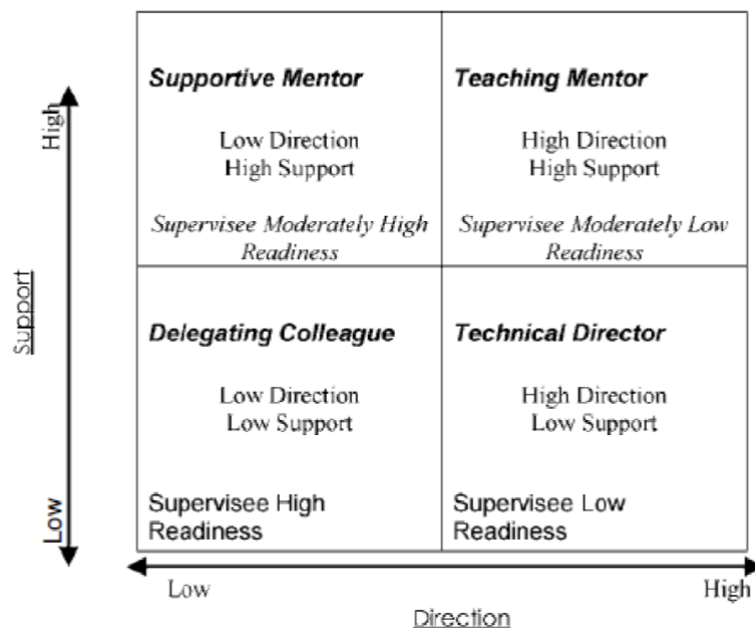
Accordingly, Watkins (2017) suggested that these styles can be matched with the supervisor's three primary roles. He also stated that the supervisor would act as a consultant, counsellor, and teacher when interacting with trainees. A supervisor who plays a role as a consultant is similar to the supervisor who engages with an attractive style. The counsellor role is similar to the interpersonally sensitive style, and finally, the teacher role is similar to supervisors who adopt the task-oriented style (Evans et al., 2016).

Based on the explanation above, the supervisory style refers to a series of behaviour patterns used by supervisors to establish a working relationship with their supervisees (Fickling et al., 2019). Understanding a supervisory style would enhance the supervisory relationship, reduce some of the defensiveness that characterizes many supervisory relationships, and build on the supervisee's strengths. Moreover, various supervision models should be provided as an option to meet the supervisee's needs during supervision instead of using only one style throughout the supervision process.

## 1.2 Adaptive Supervision in Counselor Training (ASiCT) Model

Based on Lee (2013), ASiCT Model is a model that provides a way for supervisors to supervise their supervisees during the supervision process. Under the ASiCT Model, supervisors have to match the style used with the supervisees' readiness and the supervision goal to help them move forward to the next skill and development level (Poncy, 2020). This study will be based on the ASiCT Model to illustrate the supervisors' supervisory styles as perceived by counselling interns. As the match and move concept is fundamental to the ASiCT Model, supervisors can match their methods or interventions to supervisees' readiness and move the supervisee to increase their readiness to address issues in the future during the counselling process (Boëthius et al., 2006).

There are four styles of supervision identified under the ASiCT Model. The four styles are labelled as technical director, teaching mentor, supportive mentor, and delegating colleague. Each style in this Model is differentiated by the supervisors' level of support and direction towards supervisees. Each style used should be based on the supervisees' readiness and level of development. The following are the description and details of each style under the ASiCT Model (See in Figure 1).



**Fig. 1** Four ASiCT Supervisory Styles Based on Degree of Support and Direction.

Accordingly, a supervisor who applies the technical director style will provide the direction on those issues and give some samples with burnout issues that are relevant to the case that the supervisee deals with. Simultaneously, the teaching style will provide the necessary direction to the supervisee in the counselling process. Furthermore, the technical director style provides the direction on those issues and gives some samples with burnout issues relevant to the case that the supervisee is dealing with. Simultaneously, the teaching style will provide the necessary direction to the supervisee in the counselling process. Besides, the supportive mentor style is characterized by a low degree of direction and a high support level. The supervisee highly respects the supervisor using this style. Delegating the Colleague style provides direction and support at a minimal level. The supervisor will act as the recipient by receiving information from the supervisee regarding client status and their progress during the counselling process. Thus, this study places more focus on the most prevalent supervisory styles of the ASiCT model used to determine whether there is any relationship between supervisory styles and satisfaction among counselling interns from public universities in Malaysia.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

Quantitative research methods were employed to carry out this study, specifically the descriptive and correlational research design (Park & Park, 2016) was adopted. It involved descriptive and inferential statistical analysis that is aimed to identify the supervisory styles and examine the relationship between perceived supervisory styles and the satisfaction among counselling interns of public universities in Malaysia. This research was conducted in public universities in Malaysia, offering bachelor's programs with counselling majors. All the participants in this study were undergraduate students majoring in counselling at public universities in Malaysia, and who had undergone their internship supervision. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of The Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects Universiti Putra Malaysia (JKEUPM), which is guided in its stance and decisions by the principles expressed in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2008).

### 2.2 Instruments

A set of questionnaires was used to collect information regarding the supervisors' supervisory styles as perceived by counselling interns and counselling interns' satisfaction during the supervision process. The study was conducted using a descriptive quantitative design which adopts a survey design (Wilson & Narasuman, 2020). The styles are based on the Adaptive Supervision in Counselor Training (ASiCT) Model by Rando. In this research, three sections of the questionnaire must be completed by the respondents. Section A consists of demographic information, section B consists of the adapted Supervisory Style Inventory (Hart & Nance, 2003), and section C consists of the Supervisory Satisfaction Questionnaire (Ladany et al., 1996).

The adapted Counseling Supervisory Styles Inventory contains 59 items used to measure supervisors' styles during the supervision process. Four styles measured by this instrument are (i) directive teacher style, sample item is "*My supervisor has given me directions on determining strategies*"; (ii) supportive teacher style, sample item is "*My supervisor spends time in establishing a relationship with me*"; (iii) counsellor style, sample item is "*My supervisor focused on issues that I raise and consultant style*"; consultant style, sample item is "*My supervisor takes on a fairly inactive stance*". The results of reliability tests of the instrument on 138 respondents conducted was  $\alpha = .92$ .

The Supervisory Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ; Ladany et al., 1996) was also used in this study. There are eight items in this instrument which utilized a 4-point scale which ranges from low (1) to high (4). Respondents were required to indicate their level of satisfaction on supervision. Higher scores obtained from the instrument show greater satisfaction. Examples of items are "*How would you rate the quality of the supervision you have received*" and "*In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the supervision you have received*". A few conducted studies demonstrated that the internal consistency of this instrument is high, which ranges from .96 to .97 (Ladany & Lehrman-Waterman, 1999; Ladany et al., 1999).



## 2.4 Sample

Based on Cohen (1992), the researcher determined the effect size of  $r = .30$  (medium), a significant alpha = .05, and a statistical power of .80 to select a sample. A prior analysis calculated for the total sample required is 84. This means that 84 respondents would be sufficient to perform this statistical analysis. In order to ensure sufficient sample size, Salkind (2018) recommended increasing the sample size by 40%-50%. Using stratified random sampling technique, 138 respondents were selected from four public universities. The respondents were selected from undergraduate students majoring in counselling who had already undergone an internship.

Following the review of the data, the results of demographic characteristics indicate that 76.8% of the respondents are females, and 23.2% are males. A total of 116 respondents (84.1%) participating in this study were Malays, followed by "Other" ethnicities, which included 10 respondents (7.2%), and 9 Chinese respondents (6.5%). The lowest percentage represented was from the Indian ethnicity, with only 3 respondents (2.2%). The findings indicate that in Malaysia, most respondents in the counselling field at the degree level are female and from the Malay ethnic group. The age of respondents for a total of 138 respondents ranged from 22 to 27 years old, with a mean age of 23.80 years and a standard deviation of,  $SD = 1.145$ . The age with the highest percentage was 23 years old at 53.6%, while the lowest was 27 years old, at 3.6%.

This study involved only two types of courses, namely, Bachelor of Education (Guidance and Counselling) and Bachelor of Counselling. The Bachelor of Education (Guidance and Counselling) showed the greatest participation in this study, with 87 respondents (63%) while Bachelor of Counselling had 51 respondents (37%). There is a distinction between these two courses, in that, the respondents from the Bachelor of Education (Guidance and Counselling) perform their internship at schools while those from the Bachelor of Counselling perform theirs at entities which provide counselling services.

The length of internship in this study varied according to the requirements of the university. The findings demonstrate that most respondents finished their internship in 14 weeks, i.e., 95 respondents (68.8%) with a mean score of 15.09 and a standard deviation of  $SD = 3.595$

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 Prevalent Counselling Supervisory Styles

Descriptive analysis was applied to examine supervisory styles practised by supervisors based on the perception of the counselling interns. Table 1 showed the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviations for each of the supervisory styles. The supervisory styles in this study are composed of four styles: directive teacher, supportive teacher, counsellor, and consultant styles, respectively. The results demonstrate that 44.9% of respondents reported that their supervisors practised the supportive teacher style during supervision, followed by the directive teacher style with 40.6%. The lowest percentage observed out of the four styles is the consultant style, with only 9% stating that their supervisors used the consultant style during supervision. This shows that the respondents observed the supportive teacher style being used more often by their supervisors compared with the other styles.

**Table 1.** Frequencies, Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviations of Perceived Supervisory Styles

Supervisory Styles	Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	SD
Directive teacher	56	40.6	3.97	0.46
Supportive teacher	62	44.9	3.96	0.54
Counselor	11	8.0	3.64	0.46
Consultant	9	6.5	3.35	0.39

### 3.2 Relationship Between Each Perceived Supervisory Style and Satisfaction Among Counselling Interns in Malaysian Public Universities

Bivariate correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the counselling interns' perceived supervisory styles and supervisory satisfaction as shown in Table 2. Each of the supervisory styles has been used to determine whether it is associated with the respondents' satisfaction during the supervision process. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to assess whether there is any linear relationship between the perceived supervisory styles and respondents' satisfaction. Findings showed Directive, Supportive and Counsellor Styles were significantly related to satisfaction but not Consultant Style.

**Table 2.** Relationship between four types of perceived supervisory styles and satisfaction

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p
Directive	.42**	.0001
Supportive	.47**	.0001
Counsellor	.32**	.0001
Consultant	.10	.125

Note. \*\*p < .01

### 3.3 Most Significant Supervisory Style on Satisfaction Among Counselling Interns in Malaysian Public Universities

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the influence of perceived supervisory styles on supervisory satisfaction of counselling interns in Malaysian universities as revealed in Table 3. Findings showed that supervisory styles significantly contributed to supervisory satisfaction of respondents  $F(3,134) = 13.934, p < .001$ . The equation based on the prediction model is as follow:

$$Y_1 = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

$$Y(\text{satisfaction}) = 14.504 + 1.253(\text{directive}) + 2.262(\text{supportive}) + (-.021) (\text{counsellor})$$

Specifically, of the three supervisory styles, only the supportive teacher style significantly contributed to the satisfaction of respondents ( $t = 3.07; p = .003$ ). This means that the supportive teacher style was the only style that significantly explained the supervisory satisfaction of respondents, while the directive teacher style ( $t = 1.50; p = .135$ ) and the counsellor style ( $t = .028; p = .978$ ) did not significantly explain supervisory satisfaction. This implied that supervisory style may explain only 23.8% of the supervisory satisfaction. In other words, other factors contributed 76.2% of the supervisory satisfaction.

**Table 3.** Regression Analysis of Supervisory Styles with Satisfaction

Variables	Beta	t	P
Directive	0.17	1.54	0.13
Supportive	0.36	3.10	0.00
Counsellor	0.07	0.63	0.53

R Square: 0.251

## 4. Discussion

This study aimed to identify the prevalent supervisory styles among supervisors as perceived by counselling interns in Malaysian public universities and examined the relationship between perceived supervisory styles and supervisory satisfaction among counselling interns in Malaysian public

universities. The results showed that most of the respondents perceived their supervisor used the supportive teacher style followed by a directive teacher style, instead of the counsellor style, or consultant style. Based on the value of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, the results also showed that three of the four supervisory styles, as perceived by the counselling interns, were significantly related to supervisory satisfaction. Three types of styles were significantly related to supervisory satisfaction, and the strength of the relations was medium with positive correlations. The results also showed a significant relationship between the directive teacher style, supportive teacher style, and counsellor style with supervisory satisfaction. However, consultant style was not significantly correlated with supervisory satisfaction. Accordingly, multiple regression analysis showed 76.2% of satisfaction among counselling interns in Malaysian is contributed by supportive supervisory style.

This study is consistent with the previous study by Brooks (2018) and Fernando and Hulse-Killacky (2005). They reported that both supervisors and supervisees' consistently rank the supportive style as high at pretest and post-test rather than the consultant style. This study also supports the ASiCT Model used in the Malaysian context and has contributed to the literature of counselling supervision on the adapted version of supervisory style inventory. However, Luke and Goodrich (2019) also stated that most supervisors preferred to use the counsellor style, followed by a supportive style during supervision. This showed that the high degree of support had been implemented during the supervision process in the Hart and Nance (2003) study because both supportive and counsellor styles provide a high degree of support during supervision. This study's findings revealed that most of the respondents perceived their supervisors to provide high direction during supervision, with most of them stating that they have been supervised using the supportive teacher style followed by the directive teacher style.

As stated in the study conducted by Mackay et al. (2020), a master's degree counsellor achieved significantly better outcomes than their counterparts with bachelor's degrees in dealing with their clients. Thus, supervisors need not use direct style and give more support for supervisees who underwent master's degree, as opposed to supervisees who are still studying at the bachelor's degree level, who still require high direction and support during the supervision process. It is believed that supervisees will want and need a structure and direction in supervision in the beginning. Perhaps, supervisees value support or an exploration of their feelings at the beginning of the supervisory relationship (Hart & Nance, 2003). This is supported by White (2017) and Hilli and Sandvik (2020), where they stated that the supervisor used a different supervision approach following the interns' experience and level of training. Counselling interns who have low conceptual levels in defining and solving problems will be supervised using the directive approach while counselling interns with high conceptual levels will be supervised using the non-directive approach. They also stated that the supervision approach and relationship during the supervisory process will change as they gain experience.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study has brought new awareness to counselling supervisory styles and demonstrates on the styles prevalent in Malaysia. The findings of the study will then provide clear support to interns and students to prepare themselves when dealing with their supervisors. The training and supervision experience that supervisees undergoes are important so that future counsellors are well-trained (Jaafar, 2011). The results of this study can also enable interns, students, lecturers, supervisors, and universities to understand the typical styles applied during internship. They attain sound knowledge about the relationship between the various styles and the nature of their relationships. In return, a positive working alliance between the supervisors and supervisees can be formed, then influence the supervisees' development (Ghazali et al., 2018b). The findings from this study will also raise the understanding of supervisors. They will be able to know their preferences in their supervision process and how they can provide guidance to interns or students to reach a higher degree of satisfaction. Another important aspect of this research is that the supervisors, lecturers, and the universities will be able to actively identify the best ways to promote and facilitate their counselling interns or supervisees' professional development. They can discuss what they can do to help the counselling interns to improve professional abilities during and throughout the supervision process. This knowledge will add to the field of counselling supervision. Students will also make better informed decisions upon completing their internship.



## 6. Limitations

Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) defined limitations as potential research drawbacks. This study is limited because it relies only on the participants. Like other self-reporting research, there is an implicit bias. The reliance on self-reporting may be valid for counselling interns' demographics; but it can be skewed to consider supervisory styles during supervision. Despite its drawbacks and challenges, however, it may be more effective to survey both the counselling interns and lecturers. Another limitation in this study is the selected sample. Only final year students from universities in Peninsular Malaysia were selected. Interns from East Malaysia were excluded due to time and financial constraints. Since the sample is only taken from four universities, generalizations may be limited only to the universities involved in this study. Furthermore, the study focuses only on thought aspects from interns. The judgment concerning supervisors may contain some form of bias. Nonetheless, an actual observation in the future can assist researchers in removing this partiality.

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