

## School counselor leadership skills development: A systematic literature review

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### Abstract

Studies about school counselor leadership skills development shows diverse findings. Therefore, a comprehensive review of the emerging literature is required. This study utilized a systematic literature review in order to assess existing understanding about the school counselor leadership skill development. This research adhered to the Standard Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocols (PRISMA-P) to collect 15 articles in accordance with the inclusion criteria. This article describes the context of leadership skill development among school counselors over the last ten years and measurement methods used in previous studies. It identifies possible contexts for developing future school counselor leadership skills. The research results are expected to provide insights for research designs in the future, so that they can formulate a framework for developing school counselor leadership skills that are meaningful and useful for improving the counseling profession. The findings of this research offer straightforward access to the recent state of research about school counselor leadership skills development. Some recommendations for research in the future are 1) leadership skills development that can be carried out at the doctoral level; 2) considering emotional intelligence in the preparation of intervention programs; and 3) developing the cultural and environmental context of the school counselors.

**Keywords:** *leadership skills development, school counselor, systematic literature review*



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### Introduction

Issues of school counselor leadership are inseparable from issues of teacher leadership. Historically, Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (Brandisauskiene, 2019) described the enhancement of ideas about leadership of teacher within three waves. In the first wave, the core of teacher leadership consists of teachers within formal managerial positions, such as deans, field

commissioners, and union representatives, whose work is primarily focused on improving the efficiency of school operations emphasis was placed on. The second wave focused on the leadership of teachers as educators and created positions to leverage their educational knowledge. In the third wave, teacher leadership will focus on leadership efforts to build and maintain a collaborative learning culture in schools and improve classroom practice. It is essential to offer support in cultivating leadership dimensions as versatile skills applicable to diverse organizational leadership roles in the counseling field. Additionally, acquiring leadership skills can boost counselor self-efficacy, a critical component in ensuring the provision of effective client services (Godfrey, 2022).

Referring to the American School Counselor Association national model, the school counselor has essential role in leading school transformation by collaborating and working together. School counselors have a prominent responsibility to provide comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in schools, leading educational initiatives for students' academic and career development (Geesa, 2020). Professional guidance and counseling teachers act as leaders in the school and embrace collaborative, facilitative, professional, empowering, and encouraging qualities. The study programs of school counselors need to incorporate leadership model guidance, recognizing the leadership significant in the school counselor's responsibilities (Reese, 2021).

Amatea and Clark's research (Wilder, 2018) found four specific patterns in conceptualizing the role of counselors in schools: innovative school leaders, collaborative consultants, directly responsive service providers, and collaborative administrative team. As school counselors progressively integrate leadership practices that are culturally responsive and socially adjust, their roles will become more transparent, as well as their responsibilities increasingly in line with providing intervention directly for the student (Shell, 2021). Counselors inherently possess leadership capabilities, as they become aware of students' difficulties and collaborating with students, counselors can provide support and guidance, assisting them in overcoming psychological, academic, and social-emotional obstacles.

In line with the American School Counselor Association (2019a), leadership skills form a crucial component of the model framework, encompassing the establishment, administration, implementation, and responsibility of school counseling programs. Consequently, acknowledging, nurturing, and applying the leadership skills of professional school counselors is a professional responsibility (Gibson et al., 2018). Previous research suggests that continuous professional enhancement for school counselors' leadership is crucial to establish and sustain the guidance and counseling programs (Strear et al., 2019).

Leadership skills are capacities that can be learned and developed over time and vary from individual to individual depending on neurological or genetic predispositions, individual tendencies/preferences, job exposure, and training acquired (Leonard & Green, 2019). Extensive studies have been conducted on leadership in a broad context; however, research specifically focusing on leadership competence in counseling profession is still insufficient (Neukrug., 2016; Peters & Vereen, 2020). Therefore, this literature review explores the development of school counselor leadership skills. In contrast to the previous article, which examined the school counselors' leadership conceptually as well as empirically (Fajriani et al., 2023; Crawford., et al., 2019), this study examines how previous research has developed the leadership skills of school counselors in the last ten years. More specifically, by performing a systematic literature review, this study addresses the subsequent research inquiries: (1) what are the contexts for developing school counselors' leadership skills? and (2) what are future research recommendations for developing school counselor leadership skills?

## **Method**

Systematic literature review was utilized in this study to provide an overview of research on developing school counselor leadership skills. A systematic review synthesizes research from previous researches about a certain issue, recognizing potential for further research (Hu et al., 2021). This review follows the Standard Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocols (PRISMA-P) in performing a systematic literature review (Mielgo-Conde et al., 2021) the process involves four stages: identification, screening, suitability, and inclusion.

1. Identification. Several steps were taken to identify relevant literature on the development of school counselor leadership skills, namely (a) determining the source of the database for data collection, namely from the Scopus database; (b) determining the limits of articles sought, namely articles published during the last ten years (2013-2023); in psychology and social sciences; document type of journal article; and in English (c) compile search keywords, namely “counselor leadership”, “counselor leadership development”, “school counselor leadership development”, “school counselor leadership”, “school counselor leadership skill”, and “counselor leadership skill development”. At this identification stage, as many as 50 articles met the criteria.
2. Screening. The next step is filtering by deleting duplicated publications ( $n = 10$ ). At this stage, 40 articles are screened, which will be analyzed for suitability in the third stage.
3. Suitability. At this stage, checking the article’s usefulness with the topic/theme studied, namely the development of school counselor leadership skills. Abstracts of 30 papers were read to find relevant articles, and obtained 25 articles worthy of analysis in the fourth stage.
4. Inclusion. Based on the previous three stages, 19 articles were obtained that will be analyzed in this study.

Content analysis was conducted to answer research questions 1 and 2 on each article filtered in the inclusion stage. In addition, data analysis was carried out based on co-occurrence using VOS Viewer as a tool to analyze the possibility of future research on developing school counselors’ leadership skills.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **The Context for School Counselor Leadership Skills Development**

Within the last ten years, there has been little research on developing school counselors’ leadership skills. Not all articles analyzed attempt to create an intervention program to develop school counselor leadership skills. Most studies have even identified factors influencing leadership skills, including education and training during school counselor duties. For example, the exploration of counselor leadership skills development can be done through grounded theory (Meany-Walen et al., 2013), Academic Leadership Development (Hays et al., 2021), and the correlation among professional identity and leadership capacity (Gibson, 2016).

Leadership qualities and skills can be started since the counselor is still a counseling student. In contrast, leadership skills are inherent capabilities and passion before entering a counseling study program. They continue to grow by conducting coaching, teaching, and experience during their workshop, education, and career. Counselor training programs at the undergraduate and master’s levels, even doctoral levels, can implement training activities, provide opportunities and mentoring, and apply leadership culture to school counselor preparation programs (Meany-Walen et al., 2013). It attempts to empower professional counselors in the future to embrace leadership responsibilities. In accordance with Mullen et al. (2019), school counselors who have well-defined leadership responsibilities and high resiliency tend to actively seek leadership chances and persistence in the face of difficulties.

Chi Sigma Iota (CSI), recognized as the global academic honor society for counseling students, counselor educators, and professional counselors, and an official partner of the American

American School Counselor Association (2012, 2019, 2021), has been actively fostering the development of counselor leadership skills through initiatives such as the CSI Leadership Fellow and Intern (LFI) programs. In that effort, CSI annually chooses ten student leaders in the counseling field, each of whom is matched with a national CSI leader for the establishment of mentorship connections with students. Alongside mentoring, CSI provides diverse leadership resources via local branch structures. These resources include the CSI Chapter Leadership Manual, seminars, and workshops on leadership training, narratives of successful leaders in counseling, and servant leader philosophies (Wahesh et al., 2018).

A practical training framework was formulated to develop the leadership skills of school counselors by collaborating between pre-service and in-service school counselors and principals. The framework models other training programs to address academic, emotional, social, academic, as well as career requirements (Geesa et al., 2020). It involves six components : a) adequate pre-service training; b) sustainable partnerships; c) collaboration among stakeholders; d) current practitioner endorsement; e) establishment of model sites; as well as f) continuous research and professional development. Every components contains examples of collaboration between school principal and school counselor.

In another study, authentic leadership (AL) models were used for leadership development using intensive counseling sessions, Neuro-Linguistic (NLP) programming, career autobiographies, mind maps, training session, and narrative sessions as tools (Shrivastava, 2018). This method assist students in enhancing their self-awareness and confidence, thereby boosting their ability to positively adapt to social environment both in personal and professional context. The findings promote that such leadership establishment programs and crucial subjects can encourage AL to provide students with upgraded skills and developed competence in confronting life's practical deficiency more effectively.

The study investigates the application of the Leadership Challenge Model (LCM) as a framework to connect leadership theory with practices, offering practical strategies applicable to Counselor Education programs (Shillingford, 2013). The method is expected to help prepare school counselors for more effective leadership practices. LCM concentrates on five key leadership practices essential for transforming systemic obstacles into remarkable achievements. these practices involve (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) empowering others to act, (d) becoming a role model, and (e) fostering enthusiasm. Additionally, researchers have devised a Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) applicable across various professions, which education and counseling. are part of it. Initially, the LPI comprised two versions, the first one is LPI-Self, serving as a self-assessment tool for gauging an individual's leadership engagement. The second version is LPI-Observer, utilized to assess observers' view about leadership practices of identified individual (Shillingford, 2013).

In cross-cultural education, educators are expected to be create positive change. In this context, graduate programs that focusing on cross cultural training and empower student to develop leadership skills in guidance and counseling should prioritize. Nevertheless, a program aiming to address the multicultural concern should acknowledge the need to instill a deliberate focus on cultivating multicultural leadership. Consequently, placing a specific focus to cultivate leadership skills in the crosscultural framework will be advantageous for counseling students and the educators (Brown & Shin, 2020). This emphasis is crucial for preparing these individuals to emerge as the leaders in the future counseling field with a strong multicultural perspective.

The findings of data analysis portrayed the leadership capabilities can be developed in several ways from the education stage to serving as a guidance and counseling teacher. School counselor leadership skills are able to be acquired by conducting mentoring, teaching, and training in the educational setting or pre-service education (Strear, et al., 2019). Training for developing school counselor leadership skills can be done with a collaborative approach and intensive counseling sessions to enhance the school counselor's self-awareness and confidence as a leader. While in the

in-service education stage, the development of school counselor leadership skills can involve collaboration with the principal.

### Future Research Recommendations on School Counselor Leadership Skills Development

Referring to the results of co-occurrence analysis with the help of VOS viewer software, it was found that leadership topics are related to several issues such as school counseling programs, school counselors, school counseling, self-efficacy in leadership, advocacy, counselor education, professional identity, doctoral students, identity development and Chi Sigma Iota as an intellectual community in developing counselor leadership skills. Figure 1 visually shows leadership-related topics in terms of guidance and counseling in educational institutions. It appears that developing school counselors’ leadership skills in specific training/interventions have not been the focus of research. Therefore, it is an excellent opportunity for future researchers to design an intervention that can be used to develop the leadership skills of school counselors.



Figure 1. Results of Co-Occurrence Analysis of School Counselor Leadership Topics

Based on content analysis, it was found that school counselors can seek training and experience to develop the skills needed in leadership (Gibson, 2016; Mullen et al., 2019). In optimizing leadership capabilities, counselors can cultivate collaborative relationships with school principals. When principals and counselors successfully establish a productive collaborative partnership, it generates positive outcomes throughout the school, creating a cascading impact (American School Counselor Association, 2021; Greene & Stewart, 2021). Another possible approach for enhancing the leadership skills of school counselors involves instructing them in leadership models. These models can assist school counselors in effectively navigating interactions, making decisions, and reflecting on their leadership experiences (Mullen et al., 2019). The integrative leadership model serves as an additional method that educators and counselor supervisors can employ in training leaders and initiating research projects focused on leadership within counseling (McKibben, 2016).

Cultivating leaders by focusing on the development of leadership identity and professional identity is more than just a procedural undertaking (Gibson, 2016). A counselor is a leader. The professional counseling community is responsible for promoting school counselors’ leadership identity by conducting workshops, coaching, and professional advancement (Gibson, 2016). Therefore, reinforces the professional identity of a counselor and represents the counselor’s role as a leader of transformation, which is advantageous for both counseling and the counseling professional field. In addition, schools can create leadership training programs which are collaborating school counselors and school principals, therefore the school counselors get real leadership experience (Mullen et al., 2019).

In addition, exploring cross-cultural leadership development in future research could involve investigating how counselor educators respond to the demand for CACREP standards that

specifically tackle leadership growth within cross-cultural contexts. (Storlie et al., 2015). Studies that explore the intentionality of counselor educators concerning the development of multicultural leadership will contribute to the further progress and advancement of the professional setting of counseling.

According to the data analysis the researcher formulate some research recommendations in developing school counselor leadership skills, as follow (1) leadership skills development can be carried out at the doctoral level; (2) consider emotional intelligence in the preparation of intervention programs; and (3) consider the cultural and environmental context in which school counselors come from and work.

## Conclusion

Research on school counselor leadership is a new topic that still requires in-depth exploration, for example, about the factors that influence the development of leadership of the school counselor and strategies in developing leadership skills of the school counselor. As shown in the results of the study, several development models have been formulated both in the form of frameworks and models that have been implemented. In essence, developing the leadership of school counselors cannot be done in a vacuum. However, it is in the professional field of guidance and counseling practice. It is carried out continuously so school counselors can realize their professionalism as lifelong learners. The findings of this research are expected to provide insights for research designs in the future so that they can formulate a framework for developing school counselor leadership skills that are meaningful and useful for improving the counseling profession. Recommendations for future researchers who will further explore the growth of school counselor leadership capabilities should consider the school counselor's duties, school atmosphere, as well as the culture behind their personal experiences and characteristics.

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