



Reliability Analysis of Self-Efficacy in Dealing with Legal and Ethical Issues: A Preliminary Study on Trainee Counselors in Malaysia

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Abstract

The aim of this preliminary study is to disseminate the reliability of Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICSES). ELICSES consists of 23 items and it is used to measure trainee counselors' self-efficacy in dealing with legal and ethical issues. We performed a small-scale study to assess the degree of reliability in a university setting. The findings revealed acceptable internal consistency reliability of the full scale and three subscales. Hence, the scale is an ideal instrument to measure trainee counselors' self-efficacy in dealing with legal and ethical issues. However, we suggest the future researchers work on test-retest reliability and examine ELICSES across cultures involving multination.

Keywords: reliability, internal consistency, self-efficacy, ethics, trainee counselors

Counselors' strong beliefs and assurance are essential in the process of applying counseling knowledge. It is also crucial in the course of practicing counseling skills especially for trainee counselors who are in the process of learning, developing, and applying their counseling skills in two ways (Bagheri, Wan Jaafar, & Baba, 2011). Bandura, a social cognitive psychologist stated that well-prepared trainee counselors would show greater confidence and determination when dealing with challenging issues (Sawyer, Peters, & Willis, 2013). The two

terms, confidence and determination refer to trainee counselors' self-efficacy in the dimension of legal and ethical issues in counseling. Self-efficacy reflects trainee

counselors' confidence which builds up their ability to accomplish the task successfully (Gladding, 2013). Self-efficacy is also a preeminent agent that affects trainee counselors' decision-making during challenging and stressful situations (Mullen, Lambie, & Conley, 2014). Efficacious individuals would be able to preserve efforts over an extended duration in the face of repeated

unfavorable outcomes (Bakar, Zakaria, & Mohamed, 2011).

Furthermore, self-efficacy is a belief that is developed through experience, the accomplishment of performance, and social persuasion (Curry, Arbuthnot, & Witherspoon-Arnold, 2015). Trainee counselors' actions, beliefs, cognitive competencies, behaviors, and environments may take control of their performances (Sawyer, Peters, & Willis, 2013) and it can be concluded that the greater level of self-efficacy can result in the greater performance the trainee counselors would be. Moreover, self-efficacy is a significant variable in the counselor training program where it influences trainee counselors' self-development and it ensures trainee counselors accomplish tasks excellently (Ghazali, Mohd Noah, Wan Jaafar, & Hassan, 2017; Wan Jaafar, Mohamed, Bakar, & Ahmad Tarmizi, 2011). Thus, it is significantly essential for every trainee counselor to be efficacious to pledge their excellent performance when dealing with legal and ethical issues although there is no clear method to solve ethical dilemmas (Zakaria, 2013; Zakaria & Warren, 2016).

Hence, in this study, we utilize and test the consistency of an instrument. The function of the Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICSES) is to measure counselors' self-efficacy in dealing with legal and ethical issues in counseling. We present details of the instrument, followed by a description of research methodology and our findings.

Self-efficacy scale

Researchers have measured individuals' self-efficacy based on multiple dimensions such as general self-efficacy (Lindley, & Borgen, 2002; Nel, & Boshoff, 2015; Peter, Cieza, & Geyh, 2013; Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992; Teo & Kam, 2014), information literacy self-

efficacy (Aharony & Gazit, 2018), self-efficacy for conventional lifestyle (Walters, 2017), self-efficacy for deviance (Walters, 2017), counseling self-efficacy (Meyer, 2014; Wei, Tsai, Lannin, Du, & Tucker, 2014), and multicultural self-efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, & Johnston, 2018).

In the context of the current study, self-efficacy will be measured in the dimension of legal and ethical issues in counseling. There are three instruments that were developed to achieve three different objectives in the context of legal and ethical issues in counseling (Mullen, Lambie, & Conley, 2014). First, Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Questionnaire (ELICQ) measures trainee counselors' and registered counselors' levels of ethical and legal knowledge. Second, Ethical Decision-Making Scale-Revised (EDMS-R) measures registered counselors' ability to make ethical decision. Finally, Ethical and Legal

Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale (ELICSES) measures both counselors' and trainee counselors' confidence in applying their legal and ethical knowledge. The three instruments indicate limited availability of instruments to access ethical issues in counseling and the instruments are not available in the Malaysian context to meet the local needs. Thus, as a step one effort to address the issue, we chose to demonstrate findings of the preliminary study conducted in Malaysia.

The ELICSES was first developed by Mullen, Lambie, and Conley (2014). Competence in the aspect of legal and ethical issues is one of the crucial competencies that a researcher can define and measure (Hang, 2016). The ELICSES measures trainee counselors' self-efficacy across three factors: (a) general ethical and legal issues in counseling self-efficacy; (b) suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy; and (c) counselor development

and wellness self-efficacy. In addition, the ELICES is comprised of 23 items. It is a Likert-type scale ranging from cannot do at all, moderately certain can do, and highly certain can do. The author used points from 0 to 100 to measure trainee counselors' self-efficacy in dealing with legal and ethical issues in counseling. Item 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, and 23 make up the first factor (general ethical and legal issues in counseling), item 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, and 19 make up the second factor (suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy), and finally, item 2, 15, and 20 make up the third factor (counselor development and wellness self-efficacy).

Example of items includes, "define ethical and legal terms", "explain the professional role of a counselor", and "respond to subpoena for records". The original version of ELICES has acceptable validity and high internal consistency, Cronbach alpha of .96 (Mullen et al., 2014). In addition, the consistencies of subscales were supporting as well: (a) factor 1 ($\alpha = .95$); (b) factor 2 ($\alpha = .94$); and (c) factor 3 ($\alpha = .85$). The first factor described the type of common ethical and legal issues encountered by trainee counselors. For instance, efficacious trainee counselors are expected to understand, explain, and be able to recognize signs of neglect in their clients. The issue arises when the trainee counselors find it very challenging and unable to recognize the symptoms shows by their clients which eventually results in stressful situations and trainee counselors' avoidance behaviors. Next, the second factor reflects issues such as abuse, suicide, and violence. In this factor, trainee counselors are expected to distinguish and decide when it is appropriate to report or address abuse, suicide, and violence cases. Finally, the third factor is about the essence of counseling education which is counselor development and wellness self-efficacy. Efficacious trainee counselors are

expected to recognize possible feelings of exhaustion within themselves and able to develop suitable behaviors to protect trainee counselors' wellness.

Methods

Reliability analysis is one of the important stages in research methodology and the aim is to identify deficiencies in research protocol and instruments prior to implementation (Zailinawati, Schattner, & Mazza, 2006). We performed a small-scale study in a university setting through probability sampling method. We ensured the respondents are active students in the university and pursuing their graduate studies in the Master of Counseling program.

Respondents

We recruited 30 respondents from a selected private higher learning institution in which 16.7% were males and 83.3% were females. The study was conducted in Peninsular Malaysia and all the respondents were second-year students in the Master of Counseling program. They were requested to complete questionnaires comprised of Part A and Part B. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the right to withdraw anytime from the study without prior notice.

Procedures

The questionnaire consisting of 23 items and some information about the study were distributed to all the respondents in a selected tutorial classroom. Respondents were given 20 minutes to rate their level of confidence in the ability to solve specified ethical and legal issues. Then, the surveys were collected and screened for any missing data. Next, we employed reliability analysis which involved two stages: (a) stage 1: internal consistency of the scale;

and (b) stage 2: internal consistency of the subscales. The scale consists of 23 items, followed by subscales: (a) factor 1: 13 items; (b) factor 2: 7 items; and (c) factor 3: 3 items. The findings were then compared with the original instrument tested by Mullen et al. (2014).

Results

The Cronbach alpha obtained for all the three factors were .87, .84, and .88

respectively. On the other hand, the analysis of reliability for the whole scale comprised of 23 items indicated strong internal consistency, Cronbach alpha of .91 (see Table 1). Alpha values at or above .80 are acceptable (Bindak, 2013; Tavakol, 2011; Webb, Shavelson, & Haertel, 2006). Table 1 illustrates the internal consistency of the full scale, subscales which are the three factors, and internal consistency of the pioneer study conducted by Mullen et al. (2014).

Table 1. *Internal Consistency Reliability of Scale and Subscales*

Full Scale	Total Items	Pioneer study Cronbach alpha	Current study Cronbach Alpha
Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale	23	.96	.91
Subscales			
Factor 1			
General ethical and legal issues in counseling self-efficacy	13	.95	.87
Factor 2			
Suicide, violence, abuse and neglect self-efficacy	7	.94	.84
Factor 3			
Counselor development and wellness self-efficacy	3	.85	.88

The findings of the current study were compared with the pioneer study to evaluate the consistency of scale and each factor in the Malaysia context. Based on the comparison done, it can be concluded that the internal consistency of the full scale and each factor are close to the value of Cronbach alpha obtained during the pioneer study. The difference in the value of Cronbach alpha between the current study and pioneer study ranged from three to ten units. It is worth to mention that the values of Cronbach alpha for both full scale and subscales were above .80.

Conclusion

We examined the internal consistency reliability of ELICSES. All

the factors and the full scale reported acceptable internal consistency. However, we observed differences in the reliability value obtained in the current and pioneer study. The difference is about three to ten units. All the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for full scale and subscales were below the value recorded by the instrument developers except subscale, Factor 3. However, the instrument is still reliable and suitable to be used in the context of Malaysia. We can conclude that ELICSES is found to be similar across culture. Malaysia, a melting pot of cultures has been known for its rich cultural values and traditions. They often relate aspects of lives with their cultures and traditions. In the context of the current study, the respondents may have different interpretations of the items in the scale

compared to the interpretations made by the respondents in the pioneer study. In this case, researchers will need to confront challenges when conducting cross-cultural studies (Moschis, Ong, Abessi, Yamashita, & Mathur, 2011) and this could be the reason why the value of reliability coefficient recorded in the current and pioneer study are not similar.

In addition, counseling could be an established discipline in developed nations. In contrast, See and Ng (2010) mentioned that counseling services in Malaysia have developed from infancy to pubescent stage. Looking at the past, counseling was never a matter in the mind when Malaysians achieved independence in 1957 (Raja Mohan & Sorooshian, 2012). However, today we could experience growth of counseling in Malaysia over the course time. Thus, the perceptions, understanding, and interpretations made by trainee counselors and counselors related to research in counseling may vary across cultures.

These findings incorporating cross-cultural values would contribute to the existing knowledge and help in enhancing trainee counselors' understanding of the importance of self-efficacy development. Furthermore, the study would provide a venue for trainee counselors to access their level of self-efficacy especially in dealing with legal and ethical issues. Next, researchers may use the findings of this study as references for their future studies which may involve ELICSES as well. The ELICSES is a reliable instrument and the content which encompassed of three significant factors: (a) general ethical and legal issues in counseling self-efficacy; (b) suicide, violence, abuse, and neglect self-efficacy; and (c) counselor development and wellness self-efficacy, fits the purpose for measuring trainee counselors' confidence in their ability to handle legal and ethical issues. Future researchers may work on test-retest reliability and

ELICSES could be tested across many other cultures to make a comparison study.

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