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Determination of Psychological Counsellor Candidates' Competency Levels and Educational Needs in terms of Therapeutic Conditions in the Process of Individual Counselling

Hafız Bek¹, Hakan Gülveren²

¹ Faculty of Education, Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Usak University, Usak, Turkey. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5310-3562>

² Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Usak University, Usak, Turkey. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4513-9412>

Correspondence: Hafız Bek, Usak University Faculty of Education Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Usak, Turkey. E-mail: hafiz.bek@usak.edu.tr

Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to enhance the quality of psychological counselling education by identifying needs and competencies in the field. The lack of specific studies on therapeutic conditions in psychological counseling education on a national scale has led us to conduct the current study. The study group consists of 20 students (12 female, 8 male) taking Individual Counselling course during spring term in 2019- 2020 academic year. According to the audio recordings, the participants were seen to be unable to behave at expected level under the title of concreteness of therapeutic conditions. In addition, they were observed not to provide necessary conditions under the title of transparency. However, it has been revealed that they managed to develop empathy. Moreover, they were seen to be unable to fulfill here and now principle at expected level. Finally, they were found to perform respect conditions.

Keywords: Psychological Counsellor, Educational Needs, Therapeutic Conditions

1. Introduction

In Turkey, Counselling and Guidance undergraduate program are the initial and fundamental education. As of 2007, in line with 'Pre-service Teacher Education and Faculty of Education' guide set by Council of Higher Education (CoHE), 180- hour- curriculum- 146 hours of theoretical courses and 34 hours of practicum courses-

has been executed. 34- hours of practicum course includes such courses as individual counselling practicum, professional guidance and counselling practicum, institutional experience, field study and school observations (Atik, 2012). All practicum courses admittedly play a key role in fostering candidates' Professional knowledge and skills. These courses require the planning of professional practicum carried out by candidates, implementation under observation and evaluation.

Individual Counselling is the course during which psychological counselling candidates at bachelor degree manage the counselling process by using the theoretical knowledge and skills they acquired in previous years in order to offer counselling services to their clients. Through this course, it has been seen that counselling candidates acquire a counsellor identity by experiencing a real psychological counselling process, showing that the program within the scope of this course plays a pivotal role (Meydan, 2014).

2. Literature Review

In Psychological Counselling and Guidance educational programs, following theoretical ones, practicum courses are the second most important courses. It can undoubtedly be said that Individual Counselling practicum courses take the lead among those courses. In Turkey, the issue of counsellor training is broadly discussed by scientists. The supervision process, an important part of counsellor training, is also among the issues addressed (Atik, 2012).

There has been a growing interest towards the issue of supervision by scientists (Aladağ, 2004; Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2011; Çetinkaya & Karanmak, 2012; Eryılmaz & Bek, 2019). Although a large number of studies have been observed to be descriptive research, it can be said that compiled research have also been conducted.

Supervision, a core subject of counselling training, is defined, by professionals, as a service provided with the aim of preparing counselling candidates for the profession and enhancing their practical experiences. Receiving supervision serves for two purposes which are to support counselling candidates professional development and to prioritize the client's well-being (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Besides, supervision process is considered to be a vital complement of psychological counselling training. Professionals agree that the candidates are to gain professional identity and competency and Professional skills may be gained through supervision during the practicum (Aladağ, 2004; Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2011; Çetinkaya & Karanmak, 2012). DiMino and Risler (2012) highlighted that supervision process is highly significant for each stage in counsellors' professional development. The fact that supervision emerges as a novel specialty in psychological counselling (Dye & Borders, 1990) has increased the interest in supervision practicum.

Researchers in our country have stated that in what way and quality supervision within the scope of Individual Counselling course is given and, even, whether it is given within each curriculum is not well known (Çetinkaya & Karanmak, 2012; Aladağ & Kemer, 2016). Büyükgöze-Kavas (2011) revealed various practices regarding supervision processes in universities. Atik (2012) concluded that it is not possible to mention about the standards on psychological counselling practicum and supervision and added that supervision training did not become prevalent. Therefore, it can be said that there are certain problems and certain expectations for improvements.

In order for psychological counselling offered to the client to have therapeutic effect, an appropriate therapeutic environment which contributes the clients' rebound. The fact that therapeutic conditions are included in counselling process allows the client to have the sense of belonging to the process as well as relying on the counsellor (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). As a result, the fact that therapeutic conditions are formed, and counsellors have therapeutic skills is required during the process.

The need may be improving the current performance or remedying a deficiency. A deficiency is considered as a performance failing to meet the current standards. This means that there is a better way to fulfil a task and adopting different ways poses a problem. Need analysis process helps trainers and trainees determine educational needs and the lack of performance. The evaluation may be formal (questionnaire and observation techniques) or informal (asking certain questions to the participants) (Barbazetta, 2006). One important aspect of a needs assessment is

that it helps training professionals provide input for the ultimate training design (McGoldrick & Tobey, 2016). Many of the requests that lead to needs assessments contain unclear goals, incompatible beliefs, and flawed assumptions. They contain little diagnostic information about the particular behaviors or processes that make up the current situation, what specific changes might create the desired situation, or what support from other people may be needed. In such cases, assessing needs before moving on to solutions greatly increases the probability of success and avoids costly mistakes (Gupta, Sleezer & Russ-Eft, 2007).

The decisions concerning whether the individuals acquire training, and the type of training are based on the identification of educational needs. Need analysis facilitates integrating education and its outcomes since the initial decisions regarding the type of education offered by institutions are made. Educational need analysis includes constituting educational objectives and has an effect on the improvement and evaluation of education (Taylor, O'Driscoll & Binning, 2006; Sönmez, Alacapınar, Zeybek, & Yıldızlı, 2019). Although training itself certainly provides skills and learning and development, the training needs assessment is the preliminary process that ensures the training is grounded in the needs of the organization (McGoldrick & Tobey, 2016). In this regard, the analysis on candidates' competencies regarding therapeutic conditions is of importance in terms of uncovering the objectives of curriculum prepared in accordance with their educational needs towards those conditions.

Psychological counsellors are required to gain certain skills in order to manage counselling process. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to determine how often and in what level candidates' skills to form therapeutic conditions are revealed and, additionally, to evaluate whether a candidate needs training regarding individual counselling competencies. Furthermore, the lack of specific study on therapeutic conditions in psychological counselling education on a national scale has led us to conduct the current study. In fact, the quality of psychological counselling education may be enhanced on the condition that further research is conducted and needs and competencies in the field are determined.

3. Method

The main purpose of the present research is to identify the supervising skills exhibited by candidates. Qualitative approach has been adopted since, in the research, it has been attempted to determine at what levels they realize those skills as well as revealing their strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative data analysis is a process in which researcher arranges the data, divides into analyse units, eventually draws meaningful knowledge and later builds a logical pattern; explores important variables and decides which information she/he includes in his/ her report (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Walcott, 1994).

The current research adopted content analysis among qualitative research methods. Content analysis is a research tool widely based on analysing texts and visual images. In content analysis, a set of categories regarding the research are established, and later, count the number of instances that fall into each category (Silverman, 2001).

3.1 Population and Sample of the Study

The sample of the study includes 20 students (12 female, 8 male) taking Individual Counselling course during spring term in 2019- 2020 academic year.

3.2 Data Collection Tools

The participants were requested to carry out eight sessions within the scope of Individual Counselling course and the sessions were recorded and then the recordings were decoded. The data on student competencies are based on approximately 120 hours of audio recordings. The data concerning candidates' competencies depend on these recordings. Since the competencies entail an investigation based on certain criteria and categories, 'Counsellor Skills Evaluation Form' developed to be used for Six- Stage Supervision Model developed by Eryılmaz and Süral (2014) was employed in the research. The form consists of four main titles and sub- titles which are *construction* (duration, process, objective), *therapeutic conditions* (concreteness, transparency, empathy, here and now, respect)

therapeutic skills (inviting to speak, reflection of emotion and content, minimal encouragement, personalization, including oneself, revealing oneself, summation and confrontation) and *managing therapeutic process* (supervising the client, the client's self- supervision and supervising counselling process). In the present study, therapeutic conditions were elaborated, and candidates' skills and educational needs were attempted to be determined. In Counsellor Skills Evaluation Form, 'Yes' option was chosen on the condition that the candidate exhibited the behaviours included in the form; however, 'No' option was selected on the condition that the candidate did not exhibit the behaviours included in the form. In the transparency sub-dimension, if the consultant candidate showed the ability to "create the transparency condition without judging the client," it was evaluated as "yes." If the consultant candidate did not take any action related to this skill, it was evaluated as "no." In the light of the findings of the form, the main skills of the candidates were revealed in addition to identifying the skills they lacked.

4. Results

There is a set of therapeutic conditions that are required to be provided during individual counselling process. These conditions play a key role in resolving clients' problems. In this study, concreteness, transparency, empathy, here and now principles were investigated under the title of therapeutic conditions. The results are as follows.

4.1 Findings concerning concreteness sub-dimension

Table 1 shows the candidates' skills concerning concreteness, transparency, empathy, here and now principles, respect sub- titles.

Table 1: The Frequency of Behaviours regarding Therapeutic Conditions according to the Sessions

Therapeutic Conditions	Sessions															
	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8	
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
Concreteness	5	15	9	11	10	10	11	9	13	7	13	7	14	6	14	6
Transparency	5	15	7	13	7	13	9	11	9	11	10	10	10	10	11	9
Empathy	1	19	4	16	8	12	12	8	14	6	15	5	15	5	16	4
HereandNow	1	19	4	16	5	15	7	13	8	12	10	10	11	9	11	9
Respect	12	8	15	5	16	4	17	2	17	2	18	2	18	0	20	0

Concreteness refers to the therapeutic conditions where counsellor encourages the client to speak more precisely by making him/her focus on his/ her problem instead of other issues (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). The candidate is expected to help the client unburden himself/ herself by asking open- ended questions. According to Table 1, it has been seen that the counsellor candidates are insufficient in terms of concreteness skill in the first session; however, as the number of sessions increases, the number of those who demonstrate the above- mentioned skill increases. Nevertheless, it was determined, according to the analysis of the sound recordings, that there was an increase in the quality of the concreteness skill. As an example of the correct use of the concreteness skill, the 15th candidate in the 6th session can be given.

Client: *Yes, I think that the person in my life has taught me something. I've gone through an overwhelming relationship. Then, I actually think that it has affected my friendship relations.*

Candidate: *Could you more precisely say that why do you think that it has affected?*

The candidate fulfilled 'concreteness' skill by asking the right questions at right time in order to concretise the problem. Nevertheless, Candidate 8 was observed to fail in terms of concreteness skill.

Client: *Nobody wants to conflict with his/ her mother. But I sometimes do, then I feel sorry about that. I say to myself it is not a big deal and add that I wish you did that. But it is because of my stubbornness and crave to rest.*

Candidate: *You said my stubbornness, could you be more precise?*

Client: *I think that I am a bit stubborn.*

Candidate: As we did not talk about that.

Client: Yes, this may be new. Actually, I think that this is true for us, some people say that. So does my boyfriend. He says that you are such a stubborn person that even I can't deal with it. But I have nothing to do, it sometimes happens.

Candidate: You think that it happens in certain conditions.

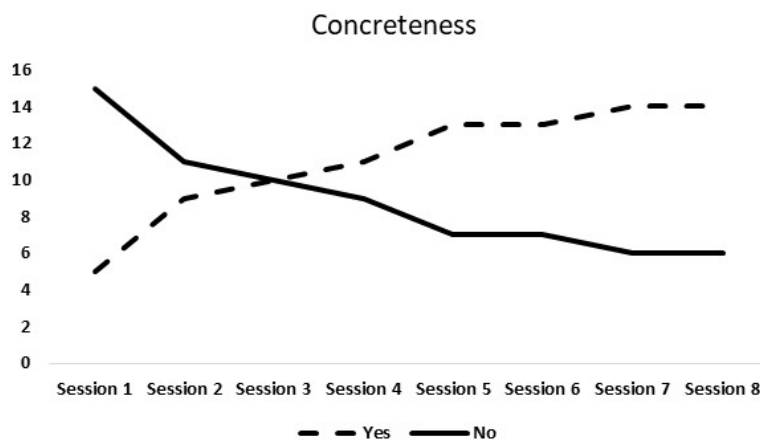
Client: In certain conditions, or it may be more frequent.

Candidate: You said that you first noticed your impatience when you were at high school. How have you changed since then?

The candidate unnecessarily asked 'Could you be more precise?' that would not contribute to the problem. Moreover, the client gave a simple answer. Besides, the client did not have a problem like 'being stubborn' and that was not the main problem to be solved. Therefore, this led to the client to digress from the subject. This situation was observed in a number of sessions with other candidates.

Figure 1: Frequency of Observation of Concreteness Skill by Session

Following eight sessions, it was observed that not all students were able to demonstrate their concreteness skills in expected quality (Figure 1). Despite the explanations made by the supervisor at the end of each session on the development of the skill, 6 counsellor candidates could not transform the expected concreteness skill into



behaviour. It can be said that counsellor candidates need training on concreteness skills.

4.2 Findings concerning transparency sub-dimension

Concreteness refers to the consistency among emotions, thoughts and behaviours during individual counselling and candidate's reflection to the client if necessary (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). The candidate should not behave judgementally while fulfilling this condition.

It has been determined that candidates could not manage to realize transparency condition. Instead of transparency condition, they mostly carried out the process through the reflection of content. Furthermore, they were observed to occasionally use judgemental language.

(Candidate 15) 'What you think is not true, how can you change your working conditions. You are completely wrong. If you want to hold on to your work, you should put these thoughts and emotions aside.'

(Candidate 8) "You avoid talking to people. You are not involved in group work. You want to work alone, but you can't do that either. Why is that? You choose hard work to get in the way of others. Not like this, you have to learn to work with your friends."

Candidate 15 and 8 interrupted counselling process by using judgmental language. In particular, as seen in his/ her language, Candidate 8 did not take client's emotions into consideration. It can be said that this would not contribute the client to solve his/ her problem.

Client: The dormitory is not good, so the food is. The rooms are cold, there is no enough hot water so we cannot have a shower. The prices are high. We cannot rent a house. How can I study at a university in such a situation?

Candidate 19: You are not satisfied with the environment you live in. In our first session, you said that you stayed in a decent dormitory and made good friends. What changed your opinions?

Candidate 19 understood the clients' statements correctly, revealed inconsistencies in his/ her opinions by emphasizing the difference between clients' prior and current statements in an attempt to carrying out a healthy counselling process.

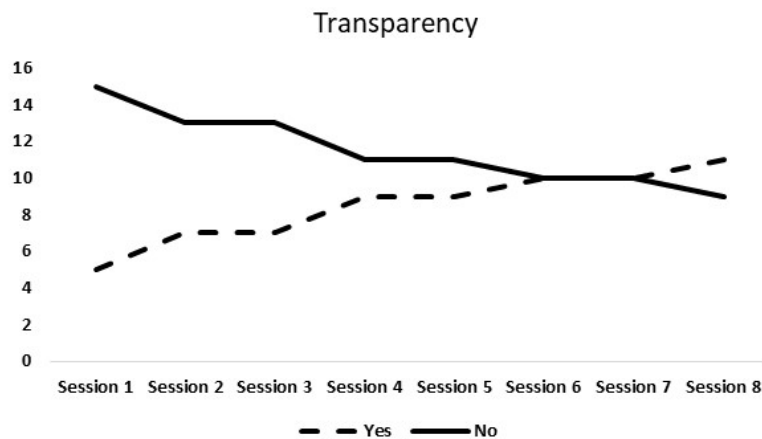


Figure 2: Frequency of Observation of Transparency Skill in Each Session

According to Figure 2, following the sessions, supervision had a positive impact on the use of transparency skills during counselling process to some extent. However, even after the last session, nine candidates were seen to be unable to exhibit transparency skills. On the contrary, eleven candidates were found to exhibit transparency skills at expected level. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that counsellor candidates need training.

4.3 Findings concerning empathy sub-dimension

Empathy condition in individual counselling refers to the fact that candidate's ability to emotionally understand what his/ her client feels, to emphasize that s/ he is here for the client and is ready for listening and understanding (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). In this regard, at the end of eight sessions, sixteen out of twenty participants managed to fulfil empathy condition at expected level.

When looking at Candidate 1 in 2nd session;

Client: I could adapt better after a week. Now, I can adapt more. I got used to the city and my friends. All these helped me adapt.

Candidate: As time passes, we can say, your friends helped you adapt to the school.

In this example, the candidate managed to establish empathy with the client.

(Candidate 17 in 7th session)

Candidate: Yes, you said that Enes might be a reason. So, what are the reasons? Could you be more precise?

Client: There is such a thing that the society confirms you. I guess this may be due to the fact that the society accepts you.

Candidate: Alright.

Client: For a long time, I did so, but then I didn't. I think I couldn't say no again.

Candidate: Alright.

Client: This may be due to the fact that I needed to be accepted or to feel the sense of belonging.

Candidate: Alright.

No empathy condition was observed in this example. The client needed to be accepted by a group and to feel the sense of belonging and had difficulty whereas the candidate simply behaved in a way that the conversation went on. The candidate did not use any statements which would show that s/ he understood his/ her client. His/ her statements were observed to be an incentive.

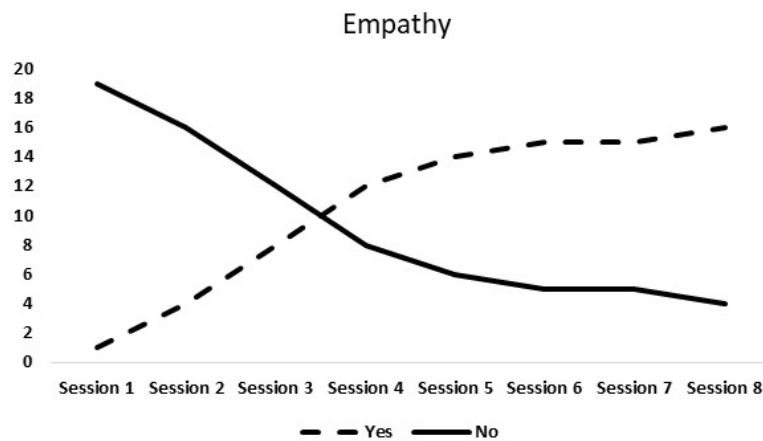


Figure 3: Frequency of Observation of Empathy Skill in Each Session

According to Figure 3, 16 candidates were found to exhibit empathetic skill at expected level. During the interviews with the other candidates, they stated that they considered clients' problems as if the problems were their own problems. This led the candidates to be unable to exhibit empathetic skills as well as interrupting professionalism during counselling process. Apart from four candidates, other candidates were found to exhibit empathetic skills at expected level and they did not need training on this skill.

4.4 Findings concerning here and now sub-dimension

Both counsellor candidates and clients may have a set of behaviours, emotions and thoughts in counsellor- client relationship during counselling. These emotions and thoughts are immediately elaborated during counselling process (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). Fulfilling this condition plays a key role in clients' exploring and understanding themselves. Effective listening and silence are considered to be significant in terms of candidate's focusing on here and now principle. In this regard, psychological counsellor candidates make mistakes by misusing the moments of silence, making the client digress from the subject by breaking the silence and finding the client responsible for the silence.

When investigating audio- recordings, no silence expect one in a session was observed during individual counselling. In this regard, the process was vividly and flowingly carried out.
(Candidate 9 in the 1st session)

Client: *Back to the family, when my father left and I first came here, I had planned what I was going to do here. I planned to leave my family and live there, but now I see that it did not work. My father left and I started to cry because I did not know what to do... (The client was affected so much).*

Candidate: *I guess this is a bit difficult for you now.*

Client: *There is no problem when I don't think about that but ...
(Client cried, silence)*

Client: *I have been apart from my family for a week so far. This time it will last for a month and more. I actually thought that I overcame and did not cry but I was wrong.*

Candidate: *I see. How do you feel when we are talking about that?*

Client: *We can say sorrow, missing.*

In the situation above, the candidate digressed from the subject by saying ‘I see’ and asking a new question although she/he attempted to benefit from the moments of silence and emotion. ‘I see’ is not considered as the right statement here. On the contrary, the candidate was required to summarize what she/he understood from client’s statements.

When looking at other candidates’ audio recordings, it was revealed that they failed to fulfil here and now principle at expected level.

(Candidate 13 in the 5th session)

Client: ... lack of confidence. I care about confidence and sincere feelings in my relations. For example, I and my friend were talking. Anyway, let’s skip this, I tell you about something that happened to me at school.

Candidate: Okay, as you know.

During this process, the candidate could not manage to realize here and now principle by asking the client why she/he wanted to skip this issue, what bothered him/ her so much and saying that thinking about another topic would not solve the current problem.

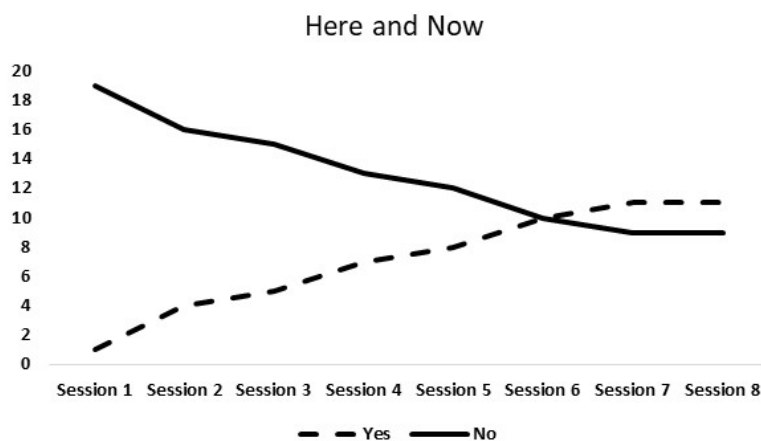


Figure 4: Frequency of observation of here and now skill by session

At the end of eight sessions, 11 out of 20 candidates were observed to exhibit here and now skill; however, 9 were unable to exhibit this skill (Figure 4). Supervision activities following the sessions were seen to be ineffective. Candidates were unable to focus on clients’ emotions and use them to solve their problems during sessions. Based on audio recordings, candidates’ inability to carry out effective listening was also revealed. In addition, they were found to be unable to reflect emotions. As a result, it can be concluded that training on here and now skill for candidates is required.

4.5 Findings concerning respect sub-dimension

Respect condition in individual counselling refers to the fact that the candidate accepted and stated that his/ her client was an independent person in terms of thoughts, emotions and actions (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). Transparency, in other words sincerity, honesty and naturality, means caring about emotions and communicating it. Unconditional acceptance in this process refers to accepting an individual as s/ he is in all his/ her parts.

The candidates were seen to carry out respect condition at the end of the eighth session. Through supervision provided in initial sessions, candidates were observed to perform respect condition during counselling process and no educational need regarding this was identified.

During the first sessions, the candidates were observed to fail to realize respect condition. It was revealed that respect condition was fulfilled in further sessions through supervision.

(Candidate 20 in 8th session)

Client: *I made up my mind, I will keep my distance with my boyfriend by making up excuses. This is going to be better, I am done with him. I can't stand him.*

Candidate: *You want to break up with your boyfriend. Of course, you can make the right decision about that.*

Client: *Yes, it is exactly what I mean. I definitely want to break up.*

Candidate: *You think that a change will be good for you.*

Here, candidate did not ignore client's emotions and did not leave him/ her in a difficult situation by asking questions or making comments. The client's emotion was reflected and it was shown that she/he was accepted.

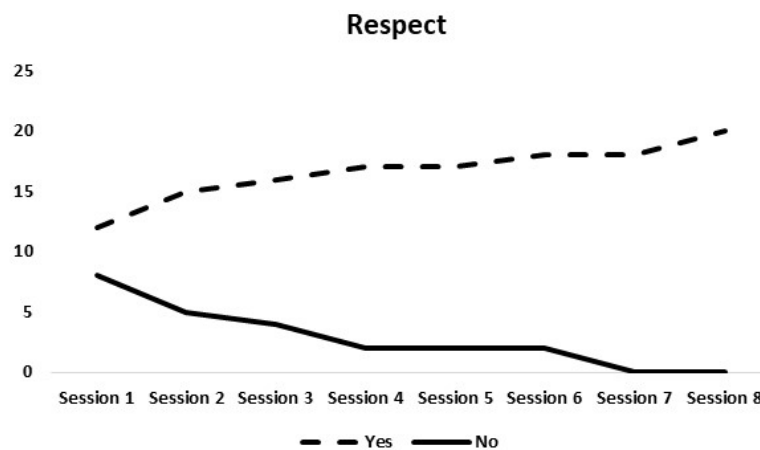


Figure 5: Frequency of observation of respect skill by session

Respect skill has been found to be exhibited easily by the candidates according to Figure 5. Following the eighth session, it was determined that all candidates exhibited respect skill at expected level. Counsellor candidates were observed to take clients' individual differences into consideration. During supervision activities, a candidate stated that s/he carried out counselling process with respect although s/he was seen to nearly insult to the client. At the end of sessions, all candidates exhibited empathetic skills and considering positive effects of supervision activities on the process, it can be said that a special training regarding this skill is not required.

5. Result and Discussion

Psychological counselling education play a pivotal role in individuals' mastering in the field and experiencing positive feelings, improving, reinforcing and realizing their skills and strengths (Eryilmaz, 2013).

Gerard (1975) articulated that counsellor candidates were mainly responsible for acquiring certain skills as effective listening, establishing a relationship with empathy, respect, concreteness and sincerity which helped them be effective during counselling process. As the first sub- title 'concreteness' in the research, audio recordings during sessions were examined. The candidates, at this point, were expected to help the client unburden himself/ herself by asking open- ended questions about his/ her situation, thoughts and emotions. The candidates were initially observed to have difficulty during the process; however, they managed to show expected behaviours at the end of practices. Therefore, it cannot be said that all the participants in the research were able to exhibit the expected behaviours at expected levels.

As for the second sub- title, 'transparency', candidates were not able to form necessary conditions whereas they were expected to. Instead of transparency, the process was carried out with the reflection of content and the candidates were observed to use judgemental language at times.

Supervisors require utilizing appropriate and effective interpersonal relationship skills in order to establish and improve a qualified supervision relation. At the very first stages of the relationship, the skills were to be more empathetic and supportive; at further stages, they must be associated with confrontation and evaluation (Campbell, 2000). Regarding another sub- title in the research, empathy, a number of candidates were observed to understand the client's emotions and thoughts, thereby developing empathy towards him/ her as the number of counselling increased. However, %45 of the counsellor candidates were insufficient. Therefore, the candidates need training on empathetic skill for counselling processes to be conducted properly.

The fact that counsellor immediately addresses client's emotions and thoughts during counselling process refers to here and now principle. Fulfilling these conditions is significant in terms of clients' exploring and understanding themselves (Eryılmaz & Süral, 2014). The candidates require to be aware of their own skills, weaknesses and strengths; the characteristics and expectations of the society they live in; in addition, they must make the most appropriate decisions and to adapt to the society (Ercan, 2001). As for this sub- title, however, the candidates were revealed to fail to fulfil here and now principle at expected level. The candidate could not manage to realize here and now principle by asking the client why she/he wanted to skip this issue, what bothered him/ her so much and saying that thinking about another topic would not solve the current problem. Moreover, the candidates were indicated to fulfil respect condition.

According to the findings of the research, further qualitative research is recommended in order to determine candidates' skills and needs. Practical solutions regarding therapeutic skills training may be focused based on psychological counsellors' opinions. Besides, candidates' therapeutic skills can be fostered by using various teaching methods.

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