

THAI COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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The purpose of the present study was to examine Thai college students' perceptions of school psychologist's roles and functions. Participants were 164 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education at a Thai university. A questionnaire was employed to collect the data. It was found that college students majoring in secondary education rated all roles/functions as significantly more important than those majoring in elementary education ($p < .05$). Students majoring in secondary education and those majoring in elementary education differed significantly in their expectation on who they thought should serve the various roles and functions of a school psychologist if a school psychologist is not available. Juniors rated all of the roles/functions significantly higher than did sophomores ($p < .05$). However, juniors and sophomores did not differ significantly ($p > .01$) on who they thought should perform the various roles and functions of an unavailable school psychologist. Implications of the findings were also presented in this article.

School psychologists are highly trained in both psychology and education. School psychologists work collaboratively with teachers, parents, and other related professionals to provide supportive learning environments for the improvement of students in various aspects. Studies of students' perception on roles and functions of school psychologists enable trainers of school psychologists to better understand viewpoints and needs of school psychological services. That is useful for the improvement of training future school psychologists. Research on students' perception of roles and functions of school psychologists is particularly urgent in Thailand because the profession of School Psychology in Thailand is still at the beginning stage. The training of new school psychologists there certainly needs research-based guidance.

Several studies on the roles and functions of school psychologists as perceived by various groups of people have been conducted. Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka, and Benoit (2005) examined teacher's view of school psychologists in eight countries, i.e., Cyprus, Denmark, England, Estonia, Greece, South Africa, Turkey and the United States. It was indicated that in most countries, the teachers would like school psychologists to spend time working with parents, as well as training and advising them on the development of new curriculum materials and less time working with individual children. Watkins, Crosby, and Pearson (2001) surveyed the perceptions of school staff on roles of school psychologists. It was found that they gave very high rating to six services, i.e. assessment, special education input, consultation, counseling, intervention, and behavior management. Hagemeyer, Bischoff, Jacobs, and Osmon (1998) also studied the role perceptions of the school psychologist by school personnel. It was found that most school staff members regarded consultation with parents and teachers, and intervention as an important role of school psychologists. In addition, Violato, Rattan, Gornall, and Perks (1981) studied the perceptions of the general public on the role of Canadian school psychologists. It was indicated that, overall, respondents had a fairly accurate sense of the roles of school psychologists. Moreover, Poulou (2003) examined the reflections of school psychology students on the role of school psychologists. The result indicated that the majority of students attributed the role of leader to the school psychologist in relation to school personnel. The result also indicated that the school psychologists were expected to work on providing prevention, implementing treatment of children's problems, and facilitating teachers' tasks.

Trice (2007) found that advanced psychology students view assessment as the chief role of school psychologists to the exclusion of other roles; consultation, counseling, and research. Farrell, Jimerson, and Oakland (2007) synthesized the studies of school psychology in 43 countries around the world. It was indicated that the core services of school psychologists generally included direct services (e.g., counseling, assessment, and assistance with academic work) and indirect services (e.g., consultation with teachers, consultation with parents, implementing interventions). They also indicated that the relative amount of time invested in school psychologists' various services varied considerably between countries. Finally, Jimerson, Graydon, Curtis, and Staskal (2007) surveyed school psychology in 11 countries around the world. It was found that the most preferred role of school psychologists perceived by school psychologists varied from country to country (psycho-educational evaluations, counseling students, providing primary prevention programs, and consultation with teachers/staff). However, administrative responsibility was unanimously rated as the least desirable role of school psychologists.

Not only have past research studies investigated what roles and functions school psychologists hold and perform in different countries, past research studies also have determined if these roles and functions change over time. In the early 1980s, Fagan (1982) predicted change in the school psychology. These determinants were examined: (a) school district demands and expectations, (b) districts perception of its needs, (c) community response to service, and (d) desired functions of the school psychologist. Almost 20 years later Swerdlik and French (2000) still predicted that school psychology programs at colleges would continue to change to meet the needs of consumers in the 21st century, and roles and functions of school psychologists must change to meet these needs. Winikur and Daniels (1982) compared percent times devoted to various roles and functions of school psychologists in New Jersey over three school years: 1973-74, 1974-75, and 1977-78. They found no significant change over those three academic years. However, Mooney (1995), in a survey of 154 Nebraskan school administrators, found that their perception of relative importance of various roles and functions of school psychologists changed substantially between the time they first became school administrators and the time they responded to the survey. Statistical analysis showed that as time passed, they looked much more favorably on consultation and intervention roles and functions. Nevertheless, assessment was always ranked first. This emergence of the role of consultation and intervention functions becoming more prominent seems to be an international trend as noted by Wilkinson (2006) who sees a shift internationally of school psychology services from emphasis on *assessment* to *consultation, problem solving, and behavioral intervention*.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the perception of roles and functions of school psychologists in many countries, none has been conducted in Thailand. No research study has examined the perceptions of Thai college students on this matter. The profession of School Psychology in Thailand is still at the beginning stage so it would be interesting to find out what Thai college students think of this profession. The purpose of the present study was to investigate Thai students' perceptions on roles and functions of school psychologists. More specifically, four research questions were asked:

- (a) Do elementary education majors differ significantly from secondary education majors in rating the importance of the five roles of school psychologists (assessment, counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents)?,
- (b) Do second-year education majors differ significantly from third-year education majors in rating the importance of those five roles of school psychologists?,
- (c) Do elementary education majors differ significantly from secondary education majors in specifying who should serve the functions of school psychologists in the absence of school psychologists, and
- (d) Do second-year education majors differ significantly from third-year education majors in specifying who should serve the functions of school psychologists in the absence of school psychologists.

Method

Participants

The participants of this research were 164 undergraduate students (44 male and 120 female students) in the Faculty of Education at a leading university in Bangkok, Thailand. This number of students included 83 sophomores and 81 juniors whose majors were elementary education, music education and secondary education. In the present study, music education majors were classified as elementary since they were trained for elementary education level as well. Multistage random sampling was employed to get the samples of this study. Students were first stratified by their status (sophomore and junior). Then,

a simple random sampling procedure was used to obtain a sample from each of the sophomore and junior groups.

Instrument

The survey questionnaire, *Survey of Thai Education Students on the Profession of School Psychologists*, developed by the researchers, was employed in this research. The survey was divided into two parts. In part one, student status, gender, age, and major fields of studies were asked as the respondents' demographic information. In addition, the respondents were asked to rate their familiarity with the profession of school psychology on a seven-point semantic differential scale. In part two, the respondents were asked to specify who should serve the five functions of a school psychologist (assessment, counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents) if a school psychologist is not available. Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of each of those functions on a seven-point semantic differential scale. The reliability of this questionnaire was 0.85 as determined by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Procedure

The questionnaire was randomly distributed to 200 respondents; 100 sophomores and 100 juniors of the Faculty of Education at a leading university in Bangkok, Thailand. The questionnaires were administered to sophomore and junior respondents whose majors were elementary/music education as well as secondary education in four classes to maximize the return rate. The respondents were allowed to complete the questionnaires in ten minutes before the end of the classes. One hundred sixty-four questionnaires were returned.

Results

The ratings on the importance of the various roles and function of a school psychologist by elementary education and secondary education students, as well as by sophomores and juniors were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). A two-way analysis of variance with repeated measures on one factor was also employed to compare elementary education and secondary education students on the perceived importance of the various roles and functions of a school psychologist. The independent factor was group (elementary vs. secondary education students), and the repeated-measure factor was role/function of a school psychologist (assessment, counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents). The mean ratings of various roles/functions of school psychologist by elementary education students and secondary education students and standard deviations were as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1
Mean Ratings (1=low, 7=high) of Various Roles/Functions of School Psychologist by Elementary Education and Secondary Education Students, and Standard Deviations

| Majors | Assessment | | Counseling students | | Intervention | | Consultation with teachers | | Consultation with parents | | Combined | |
|----------|------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Elem Ed | 5.21 | 1.43 | 6.34 | 1.23 | 6.11 | 1.19 | 5.80 | 1.41 | 5.95 | 1.32 | 5.88 | 1.37 |
| Sec Ed | 5.65 | 1.05 | 6.60 | 0.73 | 6.46 | 0.94 | 6.11 | 1.04 | 6.32 | 0.86 | 6.23 | 0.99 |
| Combined | 5.44 | 1.27 | 6.47 | 1.02 | 6.29 | 1.09 | 5.96 | 1.24 | 6.14 | 1.13 | | |

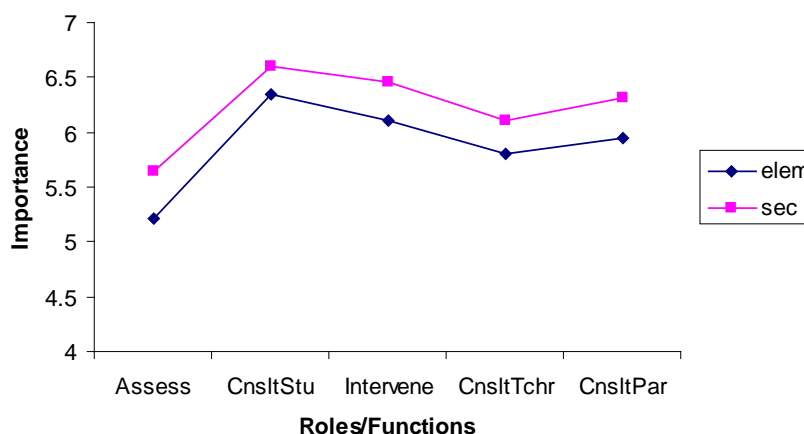


Figure 1.
Roles and functions importance rating of elementary education students compared with roles and functions importance rating of secondary education students.

It was found that the overall mean rating of the various roles/functions of school psychologist by secondary education students was statistically significantly higher than the overall mean rating of the various roles/functions of school psychologist by elementary education students, $F(1,162) = 5.81$, $p < .05$. It was also found that there were statistically significant difference among the mean ratings of various roles/functions of school psychologist, $F(4, 648) = 43.97$, $p < .01$. Students (elementary education and secondary education students combined) reported that counseling students was the most important role/function of school psychologist ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 1.02$), followed by intervention ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.09$), consultation with parents ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.13$), consultation with teachers ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.24$), and assessment ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.27$), respectively. However, the interaction effect between group (elementary vs. secondary education students) and role/function of a school psychologist (assessment, counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents) was not statistically significant, $F(4, 648) = 0.34$, $p > .05$ (see Figure 1 for the absence of interaction between the group of students and the role/function of school psychologist).

A two-way analysis of variance with repeated measures on one factor was also performed to compare sophomores and juniors on the perceived importance of the various roles and functions of a school psychologist. The independent factor was group (sophomores vs. juniors), and the repeated-measure factor was role/function of a school psychologist (assessment, counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents).

Table 2
Mean Ratings (1=low, 7=high) of Various Roles/Functions of School Psychologist by sophomores and juniors, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes

| Majors | Assessment | | Counseling students | | Intervention | | Consultation with teachers | | Consultation with parents | | Combined | |
|------------|------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Sophomores | 5.31 | 1.30 | 6.21 | 1.14 | 6.16 | 1.04 | 5.80 | 1.28 | 5.93 | 1.21 | 5.88 | 1.24 |
| Juniors | 5.57 | 1.23 | 6.74 | 0.78 | 6.43 | 1.12 | 6.12 | 1.18 | 6.36 | 0.99 | 6.24 | 1.14 |
| Combined | 5.44 | 1.27 | 6.47 | 1.02 | 6.29 | 1.09 | 5.96 | 1.24 | 6.14 | 1.13 | | |

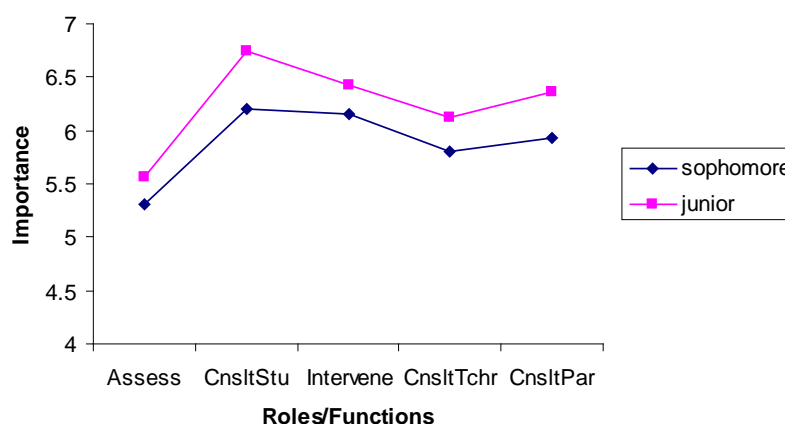


Figure 2.
Roles and functions importance rating of sophomores compared with roles and functions importance rating of juniors.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show the mean ratings of various roles/functions of school psychologist by sophomores and juniors and standard deviations. It was found that the overall mean rating of the various roles/functions of school psychologist by juniors was statistically significantly higher than the overall mean rating of the various roles/functions of school psychologist by sophomores, $F(1,162) = 6.49$, $p < .05$. It was also found that there were statistically significant difference among the mean ratings of various roles/functions of school psychologist, $F(4, 648) = 44.12$, $p < .01$. Students (sophomores and juniors combined) reported that counseling students was the most important role/function of school psychologist ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 1.02$), followed by intervention ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.09$), consultation with parents ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.13$), consultation with teachers ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.24$), and assessment ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.27$), respectively. However, the interaction effect between group (sophomore vs. junior) and role/function of a school psychologist (assessment, counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents) was not statistically

significant, $F(4, 648) = 0.97$, $p > .05$ (see Figure 2 for the absence of interaction between the group of students and the role/function of school psychologist).

The results on who should perform the various roles and functions of a school psychologist in Thailand were as shown in Table 3 and Table 4. Note that in Table 3, the percentages of secondary education students specifying school counselor as a person who should perform the assessment activities, counseling students' activities and intervention activities in the absence of a school psychologist were significantly higher than those of elementary education students ($p < .01$, $p < .05$, $p < .05$, respectively). In addition, the percentage of secondary education students specifying other students as a person who should perform the intervention activities in the absence of a school psychologist was also significantly higher than that of elementary education students ($p < .05$). It was indicated in the Table 4 that significant differences did not occur ($p > .01$) between sophomores and juniors regarding the opinion of who should perform the various roles and functions of a school psychologist in his/her absence.

Table 3
Frequency Count and Percentage of Elementary Education and Secondary Education Students on the Perceptions of Who Should Perform the Various Roles and Functions of a School Psychologist

| Psychologist | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|----------|
| Roles/functions Person | Elementary education | | Secondary education | | χ^2 |
| | Freq (Total) | % | Freq (Total) | % | |
| Assessment | | | | | |
| school principal | 9 (80) | 11.25 | 8 (84) | 9.52 | 0.01 |
| teacher | 47 (80) | 58.75 | 40 (84) | 47.62 | 1.62 |
| school counselor | 45 (80) | 56.25 | 69 (84) | 82.14 | 11.77** |
| Counseling students | | | | | |
| school principal | 18 (80) | 22.50 | 11 (84) | 13.10 | 1.89 |
| teacher | 69 (80) | 86.25 | 71 (84) | 84.52 | .008 |
| school counselor | 58 (80) | 72.50 | 73 (84) | 86.90 | 4.43* |
| parents | 67 (80) | 83.75 | 79 (84) | 94.05 | 3.46 |
| older sister or brother | 31 (80) | 38.75 | 42 (84) | 50.00 | 1.67 |
| monk, priest, or minister | 12 (80) | 15.00 | 8 (84) | 9.52 | 0.69 |
| Intervention | | | | | |
| school principal | 23 (80) | 28.75 | 21 (84) | 25.00 | 0.13 |
| teacher | 67 (80) | 83.75 | 77 (84) | 91.67 | 1.72 |
| school counselor | 49 (80) | 61.25 | 65 (84) | 77.38 | 4.30* |
| other students | 37 (80) | 46.25 | 53 (84) | 63.10 | 4.04* |
| parents | 65 (80) | 81.25 | 75 (84) | 89.29 | 1.52 |
| older sister or brother | 26 (80) | 32.50 | 34 (84) | 40.48 | 0.81 |
| Roles/functions Person | Elementary education | | Secondary education | | χ^2 |
| | Freq (Total) | % | Freq (Total) | % | |
| Consultation with teachers | | | | | |
| school principal | 38 (80) | 47.50 | 50 (84) | 59.52 | 1.92 |
| teacher | 25 (80) | 31.25 | 38 (84) | 45.24 | 2.82 |
| school counselor | 50 (80) | 62.50 | 60 (84) | 71.43 | 1.10 |
| university educational professor | 33 (80) | 41.25 | 35 (84) | 41.67 | 0.00 |
| official from ministry of education | 18 (80) | 22.50 | 23 (84) | 27.38 | 0.29 |
| Consultation with parents | | | | | |
| school principal | 20 (80) | 25.00 | 20 (84) | 23.81 | 0.00 |
| teacher | 74 (80) | 92.50 | 82 (84) | 97.62 | 1.34 |
| school counselor | 44 (80) | 55.00 | 59 (84) | 70.24 | 3.45 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4
Frequency Count and Percentage of Sophomores and Juniors on the Perceptions of Who Should Perform the Various Roles and Functions of a School Psychologist

| the various Roles and Functions of a School Psychologist | | | | | |
|--|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|----------|
| Roles/functions Person | Sophomores | | Juniors | | χ^2 |
| | Freq (Total) | % | Freq (Total) | % | |
| Assessment | | | | | |
| school principal | 8 (83) | 9.64 | 9 (81) | 11.11 | 0.00 |
| teacher | 48 (83) | 57.83 | 39 (81) | 48.15 | 1.18 |
| school counselor | 59 (83) | 71.08 | 55 (81) | 67.90 | 0.08 |
| Counseling students | | | | | |
| school principal | 14 (83) | 16.87 | 15 (81) | 18.52 | 0.01 |
| teacher | 71 (83) | 85.54 | 69 (81) | 85.19 | 0.00 |
| school counselor | 69 (83) | 83.13 | 62 (81) | 76.54 | 0.74 |
| parents | 71 (83) | 85.54 | 75 (81) | 92.59 | 1.43 |
| older sister or brother | 32 (83) | 38.55 | 41 (81) | 50.62 | 1.95 |
| monk, priest, or minister | 7 (83) | 8.43 | 13 (81) | 16.05 | 1.57 |
| Intervention | | | | | |
| school principal | 21 (83) | 25.30 | 23 (81) | 28.40 | 0.07 |
| teacher | 72 (83) | 86.75 | 72 (81) | 88.89 | 0.03 |
| school counselor | 58 (83) | 69.88 | 56 (81) | 69.14 | 0.00 |
| other students | 41 (83) | 49.40 | 49 (81) | 60.49 | 1.62 |
| parents | 69 (83) | 83.13 | 71 (81) | 87.65 | 0.36 |
| older sister or brother | 28 (83) | 33.73 | 32 (81) | 39.51 | 0.37 |
| Roles/functions Person | Sophomores | | Juniors | | χ^2 |
| | Freq (Total) | % | Freq (Total) | % | |
| Consultation with teachers | | | | | |
| school principal | 42 (83) | 50.60 | 46 (81) | 56.79 | 0.41 |
| teacher | 31 (83) | 37.35 | 32 (81) | 39.51 | 0.02 |
| school counselor | 59 (83) | 71.08 | 51 (81) | 62.96 | 0.88 |
| university educational professor | 31 (83) | 37.35 | 37 (81) | 45.68 | 0.85 |
| official from ministry of education | 22 (83) | 26.51 | 19 (81) | 23.46 | 0.73 |
| Consultation with parents | | | | | |
| school principal | 18 (83) | 21.69 | 22 (81) | 27.16 | 0.40 |
| teacher | 79 (83) | 95.18 | 77 (81) | 95.06 | 0.00 |
| school counselor | 55 (83) | 66.27 | 48 (81) | 59.26 | 0.59 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Discussion

Students' Perceptions of Importance of the Various Roles and Functions of a School Psychologist

In this study, secondary education students rated all of the roles/functions significantly higher than their elementary education counterparts. This indicated that secondary education students' perceptions of the importance of the various roles/functions of a school psychologist were higher than those of elementary education students. This should not be surprising considering the fact that nowadays in Thailand there are guidance teachers who perform the roles/functions of school psychologists in all of the secondary schools whereas there is none serving those roles/functions in the elementary schools. Therefore, secondary education students (who need to study services provided to secondary schools) had greater familiarity with the roles/functions of a school psychologist than elementary education students. A direct implication of the result from this part of the present study is that educators, especially education faculty in Thai colleges, should try to find ways to make elementary education students realize the importance of school psychologists more.

Interestingly, this study found that juniors rated all of the roles/functions significantly higher than sophomores did. This may be because juniors are more mature and they study more psychology courses than sophomores. As a result, they are more exposed to the roles/functions of school psychologists. This implies that education colleges in Thailand should introduce educational psychology as well as roles and functions of a school psychologist in earlier years of study because psychology is one of the important foundations of teacher education.

Note in Table 1 and Table 2 that students perceived the assessment role as the least important role of school psychologists compared with other roles (i.e., counseling students, intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with students). This may be because guidance teachers in Thailand are not authorized to administer psychological tests. In general, they send students suspected of having learning difficulties to a psychiatrist for diagnosis by psychological tests. For this reason, students may think that assessment is the role of a psychiatrist, not the role of a school psychologist. This could result in their evaluating the assessment role of a school psychologist as lowest in importance. If this reason is true, a national debate needs to be started on whether psychological testing in Thailand should be performed by only psychiatrists or should school psychologists be authorized to administer psychological tests as well, especially, to school children.

Although Thai education students rated the assessment role the lowest, it was found that they still rated this role significantly higher than their U.S. counterparts (Archwamety, McFarland, Livinston, & Tangdhanakanond, 2007; Archwamety, McFarland, & Tangdhanakanond, 2009). Archwamety et al. (2007, 2009) also found that Thai education students rated the other roles/functions (intervention, consultation with teachers, and consultation with parents) significantly lower than their U.S. counterparts except for the *counseling students* role/function which was rated equally important by the two groups. This pattern of lower emphasis on assessment in favor of other roles/functions a school psychologist by U.S. education students is consistent with Wilkinson's (2006) observation that, in countries where school psychology profession is in place, there has been a shift internationally of school psychology services from *assessment* emphasis to *consultation problem solving and behavioral intervention*.

Students' Perceptions of Who Should Perform School Psychologists' Functions if School Psychologists Are Not Available

As indicated in Table 3, elementary education and secondary education students differed significantly on who should assume the assessment, counseling students and intervention roles in the absence of a school psychologist. Secondary education students expected school counselors to assume the assessment, counseling students, and intervention roles, but they also expected other students to perform the intervention role more than their elementary counterparts did. In Thailand, the strategy of *buddy assistance* has been widely used in secondary schools recently. According to this strategy, high-achievement students are paired with low-achievement students to assist them in learning what they do not understand. This may account for the present study's finding that secondary education students expected other students to perform the intervention role more than their elementary education counterparts.

The finding on Thai college students' expectation of school counselors to serve the assessment, counseling students, and intervention roles has implications for Thai authorities. Assessment, counseling, and intervention skills should be provided in staff development programs for school counselors. That way, school counselors could work more effectively in helping students improve themselves where the school psychology profession is not available or while it is under the establishment

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide valuable information and implications for education colleges and educational authorities in Thailand in order to improve their existing education curriculum and to start a blueprint for training future school psychologists. Firstly, the education curriculum could be revised to have students take an educational psychology course (which should include the roles and functions of a school psychologist) earlier, such as in the freshman or sophomore year. Secondly, the topic of roles and functions of a school psychologist could be more heavily emphasized in the *Elementary Education* curriculum. Thirdly, curriculum for *school counseling and guidance* (which produces school counselors and guidance teachers) could incorporate *educational and psychological assessment* as a major component together with counseling and intervention skills. Staff development programs in these areas for existing school counselors could also be provided. Fourthly, the strategy of *buddy assistance* or related strategies such as *peer tutoring* could be incorporated into or emphasized in education curriculum; not only in secondary education but in elementary education as well. Finally, education colleges and educational authorities in Thailand could start drawing a blueprint to produce future school psychologists because education students, as shown in the present study, already have some perception of the role and function of a school psychologist and have some good ideas on who

should perform the various functions of school psychologists in their absence. It is time to have *real* school psychologists in Thailand.

Further Implications

In this study, only sophomores and juniors were studied. If freshmen and seniors were included in future studies, it would be interesting to find out whether the difference between sophomores and juniors as we found in this study would widen when we compare freshmen and seniors. Students' perception on the role and function of school psychologists in helping students solve each particular problems, i.e., behavioral, educational, and mental health problems, could also be another subject for the further research studies. There also is currently a plan in Thailand to establish the school psychology profession in the near future. It would be interesting as well to track the changing of the perception of Thai students on roles and functions of school psychologists as that profession in Thailand matures.

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