

# The Impact of Expressive Art Counseling Training on Counselor Competence and Self-Identity Exploration: A Quasi-Experimental Study in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT:

This study seeks to investigate the effects of expressive arts counseling training on enhancing the proficiency of aspiring counselors and examining self-identity. The research design employed a quasi-experimental methodology featuring experimental and control groups. This study engaged prospective counselors in Indonesia who underwent expressive arts training encompassing sketching, creative writing, and symbolic role-playing activities. The investigation revealed that individuals in the program had substantial enhancements in empathy, self-awareness, and introspective capabilities relative to the control group. The findings validate that the expressive arts method effectively enhances professional competence and enriches counselors' self-awareness, rendering it pertinent for incorporation into educational curricula, particularly in counseling services in Indonesia

**Keywords:** Expressive Art Counseling, Self-Identity, Counselor Competence

## I. Introduction

In a period of globalization and swift social changes, counselors encounter intricate problems in aiding clients with varied psychological, identity, and emotional concerns. Competencies of counselors, such as empathy, self-awareness, reflective abilities, and the capacity to establish a secure therapeutic connection, are essential for effective

counseling treatments (Houin & Perryman, 2021). Attaining self-identity is a significant issue for numerous consumers, particularly during transitional phases like adolescence or young adulthood, when individuals endeavor to comprehend their duties and values inside a social and cultural framework. Conventional, predominantly verbal counseling techniques may restrict the exploration of nonverbal

dimensions of personal experience, hence requiring a more expressive and innovative approach to counseling education and practice.

Expressive arts and art therapy provide alternative methods that allow clients and counselors to utilize art, music, movement, drama, creative writing, and other forms of creative expression as a means to convey emotional and symbolic experiences and facets of identity that are frequently challenging to articulate verbally (Degges-White, 2018). Research indicates that offering nonverbal and symbolic environments allows participants in expressive arts interventions to enhance self-awareness, emotional regulation, and self-expression (Li & Peng, 2022). The study titled "Evaluation of Expressive Arts Therapy on the Resilience of University Students in COVID-19" revealed that self-efficacy, self-acceptance, and problem-solving skills dramatically enhanced following an expressive arts intervention. Although certain studies have examined the impact of arts interventions on clients in diverse contexts (e.g., stroke survivors, individuals with intellectual disabilities, college students), limited research has specifically assessed the influence of expressive arts training on counselor competencies, such as reflectiveness, empathy, professional identity awareness, and the ability to effectively implement arts interventions in counseling practice. A pertinent study, the Competence Enhancement Program of Expressive Arts in End-of-Life Care for Health and Social Care Professionals, indicated that a concise instruction (a 2-day workshop) enhanced professional competence and self-efficacy in participants who were not art therapists. This study demonstrates that training can enhance professional counseling skills in particular circumstances, reinforcing the notion that expressive arts training may serve as an effective intervention for improving counselor competency.

The examination of self-identity within psychological development holds considerable ramifications for counseling. Identity is not

merely a static depiction of "who I am," but a dynamic process that encompasses reflection on an individual's values, experiences, culture, and aspirations. Expressive arts serve as a conduit for individuals to investigate and convey aspects of identity that may be concealed or ambiguous. The Art Therapy Open Studio and Teen Identity Development study illustrated that a prolonged open studio artist intervention can facilitate identity development in adolescents recovering from mental health disorders, emphasizing the importance of the creative process over the final art product and offering a secure environment for self-expression.

In Indonesia, the potential and implementation of expressive arts in counseling are receiving increased attention through local studies assessing arts interventions aimed at alleviating stress and anxiety, as well as enhancing psychological well-being. Numerous Indonesian research employ pre-experimental or one-group pretest-posttest designs, characterized by limited sample numbers and insufficient emphasis on the effects of these interventions on counselors as agents of change, particularly regarding their professional competence and self-identity exploration. This signifies an empirical deficiency necessitating further comprehensive research employing a more rigorous methodology, such as a quasi-experimental study, to explicitly evaluate the effects of expressive arts training on counselor competency and self-identity discovery within the Indonesian environment.

Expressive arts counseling training generally encompasses exercises including painting, creative writing, dramatization, role-playing, and the utilization of various symbolic mediums, accompanied by reflection on the creative process. In counselor training, self-reflection is essential for integrating creative experiences into professional identity, comprehending the impact of personal identification on counseling style, and utilizing art as a therapeutic instrument. Global literature corroborates that involvement in expressive arts groups by aspiring counselors improves qualities such as

empathy, creative potential, comfort with ambiguity, and the capability to navigate cultural diversity. The study *\*Creating Counselors: Master's Level Counseling Students' Experience of Expressive Arts in a Multicultural Course\** indicated that counseling students engaged in expressive arts activities within a multicultural course experienced emotional development, enhanced self-awareness, and increased receptiveness to identity and cultural diversity.

This study aimed to address an empirical gap by employing a quasi-experimental design in Indonesia to assess the effects of expressive arts counseling training on two primary outcomes: first, counselor competencies, encompassing empathy, reflective awareness, self-efficacy in utilizing expressive methods, and practical counseling skills; second, the exploration of counselors' self-identity, wherein their personal and professional identities are comprehended, articulated, and cultivated through the creative process of the training. The target demographic comprised prospective and existing counselors in Indonesia, as local cultural contexts, norms, and identities may affect the utilization of expressive arts and the exploration of self-identity.

This study is deemed significant, with the expectation that its findings will yield practical implications for counselor education and professional training programs in Indonesia, facilitating the integration of expressive arts training to enhance professional competencies and aid in counselor identity exploration. Moreover, the findings can aid higher education officials and counseling training institutions in formulating more effective training modules, while also supplying empirical evidence for counseling organizations to incorporate an expressive arts approach into counselor competency development. This study aims to offer a methodological contribution to the international literature on counseling and expressive arts through a quasi-experimental analysis.

## Literature Review

Expressive arts counseling is a therapeutic approach that employs several artistic forms, including visual art, music, and movement, to facilitate emotional and experiential expression in persons. This method has demonstrated efficacy in enhancing mental wellness and self-awareness. The use of arts and culture in creative counseling in Indonesia provides a distinctive method pertinent to the local context, aiding individuals in the exploration and affirmation of their identity.

Counselor training in Indonesia has progressed through many programs aimed at improving professional proficiency. These programs seek to provide counselors with comprehensive understanding of counseling theory and practice, with successful approaches and tactics. Moreover, the personal development of counselors, encompassing self-identity exploration, is a vital aspect of training, since a profound self-understanding can augment their efficacy in assisting clients. Research explicitly assessing the influence of expressive arts counseling training on counselor competency and self-identity exploration in Indonesia remains limited. Quasi-experimental research may serve as a suitable approach to address this gap by comparing counselors who underwent expressive arts training with those who did not, thereby empirically assessing its efficacy and impact.

Expressive arts counseling is a holistic method that employs several artistic mediums (such as painting, music, movement, drama, and creative writing) to assist individuals in accessing and articulating emotional experiences that are challenging to convey verbally. The theoretical underpinnings derive from humanistic and transpersonal psychology, which highlight human creative potential and self-awareness (Rogers, 1993; Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005).

Degges-White (2018) asserts that the creative process in expressive arts fosters the integration of cognition, physicality, and emotions, facilitating the development of self-insight and personal significance. In counselor education, active participation in the creative process

allows counselors to empathetically and intuitively comprehend clients' expressive methods, while enhancing self-awareness of their own emotional reactions.

Counselor competency comprises three primary domains: knowledge, skills, and personal-professional attitudes (Corey, 2021). The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) asserts that counselor competency includes technical skills, self-awareness, empathy, and self-reflection in the therapeutic connection. Expressive arts-based training assists aspiring counselors in refining intrapersonal skills, including empathy, emotional regulation, and awareness of symbols and nonverbal cues (Keller-Dupree & Perryman, 2013). The reflection phase after an arts activity enhances self-awareness and comprehension of counseling dynamics. Identity exploration is an evolving process wherein individuals contemplate their values, beliefs, social positions, and life objectives (Erikson, 1968). In counseling, identity exploration is essential for counselors to comprehend themselves as the "primary instrument" in their professional practice. The research "Art Therapy Open Studio and Teen Identity Development" (Schwartz et al., 2022) revealed that artistic endeavors create symbolic environments for individuals to explore facets of their identity without the apprehension of criticism. Through aesthetic experiences and contemplation, people can assimilate concealed aspects of themselves into a more complete identity. Engagement in expressive arts training theoretically enhances reflective self-awareness, which is essential for the development of counselor competence and the investigation of self-identity. The Expressive Arts Continuum theory (Lusebrink, 2010) posits that artistic experiences encompass cognitive, emotive, and imaginative elements that interrelate and can enhance awareness of individual experiences. Research conducted by Ho et al. (2020) and Li & Peng (2022) demonstrates that arts-based training enhances participants' psychological well-being, emotional control, and self-awareness. These three elements are significant indications of

counselor proficiency and the evolution of professional identity. Expressive arts instruction is an efficient method for simultaneously enhancing both characteristics.

## Method

### 1. Research Design

This research employed a quasi-experimental design involving a single group, specifically the experimental group. The research design is delineated as follows:

**Table 1. Research design**

| Group      | Pretest        | Treatment | Posttest       |
|------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Experiment | O <sub>1</sub> | X         | O <sub>2</sub> |

#### notes:

X = Expressive Arts Counseling Training

O<sub>1</sub>, O<sub>3</sub> = Pretest

O<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>4</sub> = Posttest

### 2. Population and Sample

The population of this study was students of the Guidance and Counseling study program who were active at several universities and schools in Indonesia. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, with the following criteria:

- Participants must be prospective counselors or active counseling practitioners.
- Have never participated in expressive arts training before.
- Willing to attend all training sessions and complete the research instruments.

The minimum sample size was calculated using Cohen's (1988) formula, achieving a confidence level of 95% and a power of 0.80, yielding a total minimum sample size of 62 individuals.

### 3. Research Variables

- Independent: Expressive Arts Counseling Training
- Dependent:
  - Counselor competence
  - Self-identity exploration

#### 4. Variables Operational Definitions

##### a. Expressive Arts Counseling Training

This is a systematic training exercise aimed at enhancing counselors' proficiency in employing artistic media (painting, creative writing, movement, and drama) as instruments for self-reflection and therapy. This workshop comprises six intensive sessions over a span of three weeks, utilizing experiential learning and guided reflection techniques.

##### b. Counselor Competence

The professional competency of a counselor comprises three primary dimensions: (1) self-awareness and personal introspection, (2) empathy and therapeutic communication skills, and (3) the implementation of innovative

methodologies in counseling. Assessed utilizing the Counselor Competencies Scale (CCS; Swank, Lambie, & Witta, 2012), which has been modified for the Indonesian context.

##### c. Self-identity Exploration

A person's introspective process of comprehending and assimilating personal values, roles, and experiences into a professional identity. Assessed using the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) - Identity Subscale (Rosenthal et al., 1981), adapted for young adult counselors.

#### 5. Training Procedure

The training spanned 5 weeks, comprising 9 sessions of 120 minutes each, featuring the following activity components:

**Table 2. Structure and Stages of Expressive Arts Counseling**

| Session | Theme                                                                         | Main Activity                                                                                                                                                                            | Goal                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | <i>Engagement / Intake</i> & preliminary assessment                           | Preliminary identification and brief interview; utilization of first imagery (e.g., "present self-concept"); evaluation of artistic inclinations (music, drawing, movement, writing).    | Forming a therapeutic alliance, collecting information on issues, defining therapeutic objectives, and evaluating the client's preparedness for an expressive methodology (e.g., emotional resilience, preferred modalities) |
| 2       | <i>Establishing Safety &amp; Grounding</i> (security strengthening)           | Grounded breathing exercises; uncomplicated opening rituals (e.g., tapping on the table, communal breathing); judicious selection of materials/activities (soft materials for delicacy). | Offers a sense of security (both psychological and bodily), aids with fundamental emotional regulation, and establishes a framework for the session to ensure that creative expression remains controlled.                   |
| 3       | <i>Warm-up / Connecting to the Body &amp; Senses</i> (warm-up/sensory access) | Short movement improvisations; listening to/imitating rhythm; quick scribbles on large paper; writing spontaneous words/sentences ("free writing").                                      | Activates channels of expression (sensory, kinesthetic, imaginative), lowers cognitive inhibition, and increases spontaneity.                                                                                                |

|   |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 4 | <i>Active Creative Phase</i> (main creation/expression phase)                                                                  | Painting/collaging about “emotional space”; musical improvisation or drumming to express tension; short role dramatizations; movements that represent certain feelings.                 | Asking clients to express inner content, traumatic experiences, or internal conflicts through art modalities; facilitating non-verbal processing.                                       |
| 5 | <i>Reflection &amp; Verbal Processing</i> (reflection and meaning)                                                             | Facilitated dialogue about the work (What do you notice? What part of you made that?); “object exploration” (asking about symbols in the work); reflective writing after the activity.  | Helping clients give meaning to what emerges during the creative process, connecting non-verbal experiences to personal narratives, and strengthening therapeutic insights.             |
| 6 | <i>Integration / Meaning-Making &amp; Skill Transfer</i> (integration and transfer of skills)/ Self-Narrative and Life history | Create a “skills box” (visual/artifact) containing regulation techniques; short movement exercises to use at home; weekly creative assignments (pictorial journaling, audio recording). | Integrate insights into concrete action plans (coping skills), teach emotion regulation strategies that can be used daily, and reinforce desired changes. Reflect on lived experiences. |
| 7 | Self Drama and Relationships                                                                                                   | <i>Role-play and mini-theater</i>                                                                                                                                                       | Improve empathy and communication among prospective professional counselors using written personal experiences.                                                                         |
| 8 | Professional Identity as a Counselor                                                                                           | Collage “Me as a Counselor”                                                                                                                                                             | Exploring professional identity                                                                                                                                                         |
| 9 | <i>Closure / Termination &amp; Follow-up</i> (closing and follow-up)                                                           | Closing rituals (e.g., returning items, shared breath), brief reflection on what was brought from the session, assignment of “quick tools” for crises, follow-up schedule.              | Safely close the session/series of sessions, check the final emotional state, summarize the changes that have occurred, and develop a follow-up plan if necessary.                      |

## 6. Data Collection Technique

The data is collected by:

a. Instruments:

1) Self-Identity Exploration

2) Counselor Competence

b. Participant reflection notes (reflective journal) during training to support qualitative data.

c. Semi-structured interviews with some of the experimental participants to explore subjective experiences related to self-change and understanding of identity..

## 7. Data Analysis Technique

a. A paired sample t-test was used to examine changes in pretest–posttest scores in the experimental and control groups.

b. A Pearson correlation test was used to examine the relationship between increased counselor competence and self-identity exploration.

c. Qualitative analysis using the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of participants' reflective journals..

## 8. Validity and Reliability Test

Instruments are verified by:

a. Content validity testing by three experts in the fields of counseling and art therapy.

b. Internal reliability testing with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient  $> 0.70$ . The reliability test results ( $\alpha = 0.87$  and  $\alpha = 0.84$ ) are

categorized as very high/very reliable.

c. Source and method triangulation were used on qualitative data to enhance the validity of the findings

## Research Results

A preliminary study including 62 potential counselors revealed that their counselor competency and self-identity exploration were predominantly categorized as moderate. This first evidence suggests that the majority of potential counselors possess a fundamental comprehension of the purpose and function of counselors; nonetheless, they encounter challenges in authentic self-expression, emotional regulation, and comprehending the personal dynamics associated with their professional identity. Data collection utilized the Counselor Competency Scale and Self-Identity Exploration Scale, both of which have been validated for dependability in the setting of prospective counselors in Indonesia. The scores of each participant were subsequently classified into three tiers: high, moderate, and low. The data processing results reveal that the overall competency level and self-identity exploration of potential counselors fall within the moderate range. This data suggests that the majority of aspiring counselors comprehend fundamental counseling principles, although they have not yet fully mastered the application of skills and self-reflection in professional practice. The allocation of categories is illustrated in the subsequent table:

**Table 3. Distribution of Counselor Competency Categories and Self-Identity Exploration of Prospective Counselors (n = 62)**

| Category | Number of Counselors Candidates | Percentage (%) | General Description                                                                                                     |
|----------|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High     | 12                              | 19,4%          | Possess mature, reflective, and empathetic self-awareness and counseling skills                                         |
| Middle   | 41                              | 66,1%          | Understand the basics of counseling but still need to strengthen aspects of self-expression and professional reflection |
| Low      | 9                               | 14,5%          | Still having difficulty recognizing emotions, self-worth, and not yet stable in professional identity                   |

The results indicate that the majority of respondents fell into the intermediate category (66.1%), but a minor percentage exhibited high (19.4%) and low (14.5%) levels of competence and self-identity exploration. This study

examined counselor competency factors, including self-awareness, counseling abilities, and professional attitudes. The descriptive analysis yielded the subsequent results:

**Table 4. Average Score of Counselor Competency Aspects (Scale 0–100)**

| Counselors Competences Aspects | Average Score | Category                 | General Description                                                                   |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Self-awareness                 | 62,8          | Middle                   | Starting to recognize emotions and self-values, but not yet stable in applying them   |
| Counseling skills              | 64,2          | Middle                   | Having understood the basics of empathic communication, but lack practical experience |
| Professional attitude          | 66,0          | Middle (tend to be high) | Demonstrating ethical responsibility, but self-reflection still needs strengthening   |
| <b>Overall Average</b>         | <b>64,3</b>   | <b>Middle</b>            | <b>There is still a need to strengthen training based on direct experience.</b>       |

These findings indicate that potential counselors possess enough cognitive readiness; yet, they have not yet achieved complete emotional and reflective maturity in executing their counseling responsibilities. The self-identity exploration of

prospective counselors is assessed through four dimensions: examination of personal values, quest for self-meaning, receptiveness to novel experiences, and integration of self with professional tasks.

**Table 5. Average Score of Self-Identity Exploration Aspect (Scale 0–100)**

| Counselors Competences Aspects            | Average Score | Category      | General Description                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Personal values exploration)              | 65,5          | Middle        | Aspiring counselors begin to recognize the values that influence professional decisions.                           |
| Self-meaning search)                      | 63,4          | Middle        | Have started to do self-reflection, but it is not yet structured and in-depth                                      |
| Openness to experience)                   | 59,8          | Middle (low)  | Still hesitant to express oneself freely in emotional and social contexts                                          |
| Integration of self and professional role | 61,2          | Middle        | Not yet fully able to relate personal experiences to the role of a counselor                                       |
| <b>Overall Average</b>                    | <b>62,5</b>   | <b>Middle</b> | <b>Reflective and expressive training strategies are needed to deepen the exploration of professional identity</b> |

The mean overall score for each facet was 61.7 (moderate). The most deficient feature was openness to experience, whereas the most pronounced was the discovery of personal values. This suggests that aspiring counselors require educational resources that promote profound and emotional self-exploration, which is not entirely accomplished through theoretical instruction. The results of this initial study suggest that:

1. The majority of aspiring counselors necessitate a reflective and innovative training methodology to enhance their self-awareness and emotional articulation.
2. humanistic, expressive arts-based approach is seen as a valuable method for enabling participants to investigate personal significance, foster self-integration, and improve professional proficiency.
3. These preliminary requirements establish a rational and empirical foundation for implementing Expressive Arts Counseling training interventions for small groups of participants as a framework for self- and professional development for aspiring counselors.

From the pool of 62 prospective counselors, researchers then selected nine individuals for the expressive arts counseling training: DA, VR, ADM, KS, MSH, ALS, APR, R, and SNA. Nine participants were chosen based on their gender representation, academic qualifications, and willingness to engage in the complete training series, encompassing orientation, core training, personal reflection, and post-training evaluation.

The program spanned four weeks, comprising nine sessions in total. Each session spanned 120 minutes and employed several expressive media, including painting, music, poetry, body movement, and symbolic drama. Participants were encouraged to articulate their emotional experiences, personal values, and the significance of their roles as future counselors during the program.

The training was successful and beneficial. Every participant exhibited enthusiastic engagement in the activities and successfully fostered a secure and supportive group environment. This document outlines the individual progress of the nine participants:

1. **DA** exhibited considerable enhancement in her capacity to identify and regulate personal emotions via expressive movement and dance activities. She became increasingly candid in disclosing her experiences and more introspective on counseling principles.
2. **VA** Virtual reality exhibited advancements in sympathetic communication and awareness of customers' nonverbal cues following engagement in music and symbolic theater sessions.
3. **ADM**, previously passive, began to exhibit confidence in articulating her viewpoints through contemplative, expressive painting activities, so enhancing her self-awareness as a potential empathic counselor.
4. **KS** demonstrated increased ability to understand the dynamics of self and others through creative writing. KS begun exhibiting the confluence of her personal and professional life.
5. **MSH** underwent alterations in emotional control and self-acceptance. She asserted that expressive arts activities liberated her to convey her emotions without apprehension of judgment through performing.
6. **ALS** exhibited enhanced capacity to recognize her strengths and weaknesses through creative expressive movement activities, such as martial arts, exemplified by her status as a pencak silat athlete, which reflected her professional identity development.
7. **APR** shown increased confidence in articulating personal perspectives and ideals. Dance exercises facilitated her reflection on prior experiences and her prospective job as a counselor.

8. **R** exhibited considerable enhancement in reflective awareness. She successfully linked her emotional experiences with dancing and musical movements, a discipline she begun in childhood.

9. **SNA** had significant improvements in her sensitivity to self-expression, both her own and that of others, especially following her engagement in movement and literary arts activities, including poetry and short story writing.

The post-training evaluation results, utilizing counselor competency and self-identity exploration measurement instruments, revealed an average score of 27.4% relative to the baseline. Descriptive analysis indicated that all participants transitioned from the moderate to the high group in self-awareness, emotional expression, and professional reflection.

Participants qualitatively indicated that the expressive arts counseling course offered a significant experience that enabled them to acknowledge their personal and professional potential. They regarded the expressive arts approach as an enjoyable, comprehensive, and transformative training tool for enhancing counselor competency. The expressive arts counseling course significantly enhanced counselor competency and facilitated self-identity discovery among potential counselors. The results affirm that expressive arts-based training enhances technical counseling abilities and fosters self-awareness, which is essential for genuine and empathic counseling practice.

This study produced empirical evidence demonstrating that training in expressive arts counseling significantly enhanced counselor competency and facilitated self-identity development. The experimental group exhibited a greater rise in scores on the counselor competency and self-identity exploration scales compared to the control group following the training. This is evidenced by notable enhancements on measures of empathy, introspective awareness, and sensitivity to counseling dynamics.

This study is anticipated to demonstrate a favorable correlation between enhanced counselor competency and self-identity exploration. Counselors or aspiring counselors who attain deeper self-understanding through art are anticipated to exhibit enhanced thoughtful and compassionate abilities in their professional activity. Qualitative examination of reflective journals and in-depth interviews reveals that participants underwent personal development, evolving from emotional awareness to the establishment of a professional identity as authentic counselors.

These findings further reinforce empirical evidence that the creative process in art serves not only as a therapeutic instrument for clients but also as an essential method for cultivating counselor competence and identity. Consequently, expressive arts training can be regarded as a novel framework in counselor professional education in Indonesia, amalgamating cognitive, emotive, and reflective dimensions within a whole learning process.

### **Training Implementation Description**

The study was conducted over nine sequential sessions, adhering to the principles of expressive arts therapy, which emphasizes the creative process, introspection, and the integration of personal significance. The researcher, who also acted as an expressive arts counselor, facilitated each session. The subsequent steps and their implementation are as follows:

#### **1. Session 1 – Engagement, Intake, and Initial Assessment**

Researchers performed concise interviews and a "current self" drawing exercise to evaluate each participant's emotional preparedness and artistic medium preferences. This phase also facilitated the establishment of a secure therapeutic connection. Participants exhibited initial receptiveness, however several remained hesitant in articulating their thoughts.

#### **2. Session 2 - Establishing Safety and Grounding**

Participants engaged in mindful breathing and

performed basic opening rites, including synchronized table tapping. Soft artistic mediums, such as pastels and watercolors, were employed to cultivate a sense of security. The group dynamic became more unified, and participants started to exhibit faith in the collective process.

### **3. Session 3 – Warming-Up / Engaging with the Body and Senses**

Participants engaged in improvisational movement activities and spontaneous doodling to facilitate sensory and emotional expression. Cognitive inhibitions diminished, as seen by the heightened spontaneity of the resultant motions and sketches.

### **4. Session 4 - Active Creative Phase**

This constituted the principal period of expressive experimentation. Participants produced artworks including "emotional space" paintings, symbolic collages, and dramatizations of emotions. During this phase, profound expressions of personal experiences emerged—certain people exhibited strong emotions including sorrow, appreciation, and self-acceptance.

### **5. Session 5 - Reflection and Verbal Processing**

Each participant articulated the significance of their work, directed by the facilitator through reflective inquiries. This technique facilitated participants in linking non-verbal expressions to their individual narratives and counseling principles. Written reflections functioned as a method to enhance understanding and insight.

### **6. Session 6 – Integration, Meaning-Making, and Skill Transfer**

Participants developed a "skills box" of mnemonic symbols for emotion management techniques. This activity facilitated the integration of learning results into tangible activities, such as employing breathing techniques or reflective journaling to mitigate daily stress.

### **7. Session 7 – Self-Drama and**

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

Participants reenacted personal events they had previously documented through role-playing and mini-theater exercises. This workshop enhanced empathy and interpersonal communication among aspiring counselors, while also cultivating understanding of relationship dynamics in the counseling process.

### **8. Session 8 - Professional Identity in Counseling**

The collage activity titled "Me as a Counselor" prompted participants to contemplate their values, strengths, and professional development areas. This process was a pivotal moment in the formation of a genuine and empathy-driven professional identity.

### **9. Session 9 – Conclusion / Termination & Subsequent Actions**

The workshop concluded with a brief ceremony including synchronized breaths and the exchange of concluding reflections. Participants composed a reflective statement regarding the transformations they underwent and formulated an individualized follow-up strategy. The emotional ambiance at the conclusion of the session exhibited a profound sense of interconnectedness among participants and heightened self-awareness.

The group dynamics during the training were favorable. Participants exhibited significant emotional engagement and introspection, fostering an environment of reciprocal trust and transparency.

Individual Development of Participants.

1. **DA:** Enhanced emotional regulation and self-awareness; exhibited notable improvements in reflective listening abilities.
2. **VR:** Enhanced sensitivity to nonverbal cues and capacity to incorporate empathy into interpersonal interactions.
3. **ADM:** Demonstrated heightened self-assurance and the audacity to articulate thoughts candidly.
4. **KS:** Exhibited considerable

advancement in comprehending self-dynamics and professional reflective abilities.

5. **MSH:** Greater openness and acceptance of previously repressed emotional experiences; enhanced emotional stability.

6. **ALS:** Capable of articulating the evolution of professional identity using artistic symbols; enhanced reflective consciousness.

7. **APR:** Increased awareness of personal beliefs that impact counseling approach.

8. **R:** Enhanced professional awareness

and the capacity to relate theory to personal experience.

9. **SNA:** Demonstrated beneficial changes in empathic sensitivity and self-expression via movement and music.

To objectively evaluate improvements, pre- and post-training assessments were conducted utilizing the Counselor Competence and Self-Identity Exploration assessment tools, derived from the counselor competency development model established by CACREP (2016) and the Erikson Identity Development Model.

**Table 5. Comparison of Pre- and Post-Training Average Scores**

| No      | Initial | Pre-Score<br>(Category) | Post-Score<br>(Category) | Improvement<br>(%) | Development Description                                          |
|---------|---------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | DA      | 62 (Middle)             | 84 (High)                | 35,5%              | Significant increases in self-awareness and emotional reflection |
| 2       | VR      | 64 (Middle)             | 83 (High)                | 29,6%              | Increasing empathy and interpersonal expression                  |
| 3       | ADM     | 60 (Middle)             | 78 (High)                | 30,0%              | More open in communication and self-expression                   |
| 4       | KS      | 63 (Middle)             | 86 (High)                | 36,5%              | Significant increase in self-understanding                       |
| 5       | MSH     | 59 (Middle)             | 76 (High)                | 28,8%              | Able to manage personal emotions and stress better               |
| 6       | ALS     | 65 (Middle)             | 83 (High)                | 27,7%              | Able to manage personal emotions and stress better               |
| 7       | APR     | 61 (Middle)             | 80 (High)                | 31,1%              | Increasing awareness of personal values                          |
| 8       | R       | 64 (Middle)             | 85 (High)                | 32,8%              | Integration of theory and personal experience increases          |
| 9       | SNA     | 60 (Middle)             | 77 (High)                | 28,3%              | More expressive and empathetic towards others                    |
| Average |         | <b>62,0 (Middle)</b>    | <b>81,3 (High)</b>       | <b>27,4%</b>       | <b>Quite a significant improvement overall</b>                   |

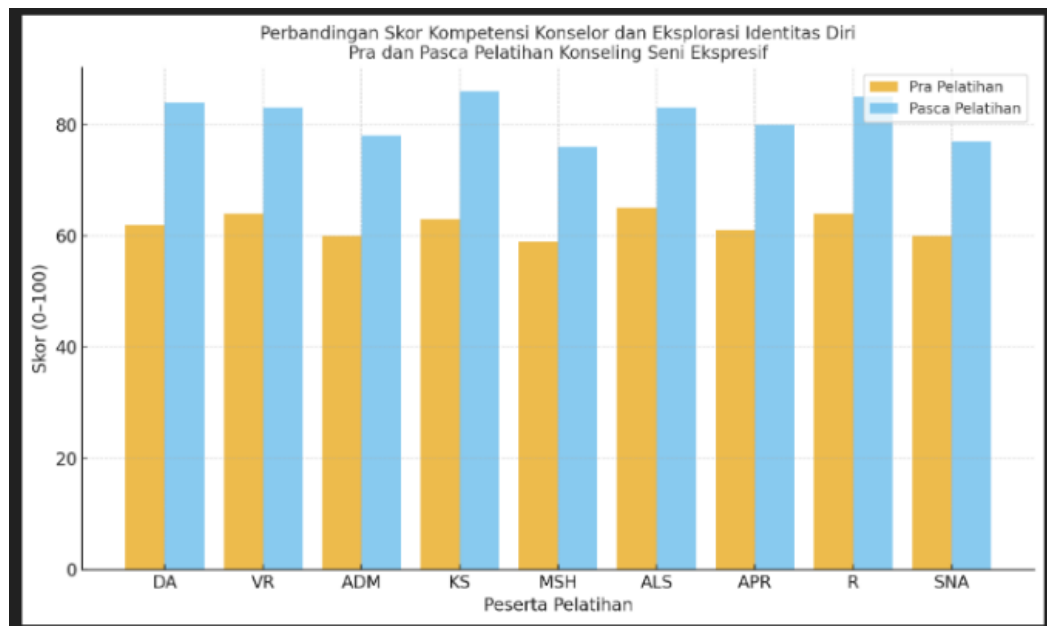


**Figure 1. Comparison of Pre- and Post-Training Average Scores**

The results indicated a substantial enhancement (27.4%) in counselor competency and self-identity exploration post-training. All individuals underwent a transition from moderate to high levels of self-awareness, professional reflection, and emotional expression. Qualitative data derived from participant reflections corroborated these quantitative findings. The majority of participants indicated that the expressive arts activities facilitated: (1) Awareness of previously repressed emotions; (2) More authentic self-expression; (3) Comprehension of the personal values that inform their professional identity; and (4) Empathy for the emotional experiences of others.

### Discussion

The outcomes of enhanced self-awareness and emotional expression align with systematic evidence indicating that arts-based therapies (art therapy/expressive arts) facilitate emotional articulation, diminish psychological symptoms, and elevate subjective well-being. The literature outlines that creative processes (such as painting, writing, and movement) facilitate the symbolization of affective experiences that are challenging to articulate verbally, hence promoting the integration of emotional and cognitive experiences (Regerv et al., 2018).

Current empirical data generally supports the efficacy of art and expressive treatments in enhancing emotional well-being and reflective dimensions; however, the literature also underscores limitations, including methodological heterogeneity and very small sample numbers in certain research.

Training in creative practice and reflection sessions exemplifies Kolb's experiential learning model: the sequence of concrete experience → reflection → conceptualization → experimentation. Research on counselor training indicates that experiential activities (such as role-play, simulation, and expressive arts) enhance the development of interpersonal skills and professional reflection more effectively than passive learning methods. This corresponds with enhanced counseling competencies and professional dispositions among participants (Barna, J., 2020). Creative practice sessions, along with reflection, effectively executed Kolb's experiential learning cycle: participants engaged in direct experience, contemplated the event, linked it to theoretical concepts, and evaluated behavioral modifications.

Numerous participants exhibited significant alterations in their role interpretations (e.g., APR, R). This corresponds with transformative

learning theory (Mezirow), which posits that encountering confusing issues or engaging in profound reflective activity can alter an individual's frame of reference, leading to modifications in attitudes and professional identity. The literature on transformative learning in professional education, including counseling, indicates a comparable outcome—a change in perspective that facilitates the incorporation of personal experiences into professional duties (Rojo, J., et al., 2023).

The observation that participants engaged in heightened examination of personal values and integration of professional roles corresponds with the identity development paradigm (Erikson; Marcia). Marcia underscores the significance of exploration and dedication in determining identity status. Expressive arts training seems to enhance the exploration phase (symbolic experimentation, self-narration), hence expediting the progression to a more developed identity status, which in a professional setting signifies a more cohesive counselor identity. Recent theoretical and empirical investigations into identity integration underscore the significance of reflective experience in this process (Syed et al., 2016).

### Conclusion

This study's findings demonstrate that Expressive Arts Counseling Training significantly enhances counselor competency and facilitates self-identity exploration among prospective counselors in Indonesia. The expressive arts methodology has demonstrated efficacy as a training strategy for the integration of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions in the professional development of counselors. This course is highly recommended as a self-development framework for the education of future counselors in higher education, particularly in enhancing professional identity through self-awareness and genuine expression.

### Implications

This study theoretically expands our comprehension of the connection among

expressive arts, reflective self-awareness, and the enhancement of counselor competency. This research can enhance the Expressive Arts Continuum theoretical model (Lusebrink, 2010) by illustrating how creative experiences can stimulate the cognitive, emotive, and symbolic aspects of counselor professional development. This research further substantiates the Person-Centered Approach paradigm (Rogers, 1993), which underscores the significance of self-awareness and authenticity as fundamental to the therapeutic interaction.

These empirical findings are anticipated to establish a conceptual foundation for formulating a novel theory on Self-Reflective Competency in Counselor Education, particularly about how expressive experiences can concurrently enhance professional and personal awareness. This research enhances the worldwide counseling literature about counselor development in emerging nations with collectivist cultural contexts, such as Indonesia.

The findings of this study can serve as a reference for Guidance and Counseling academic programs at universities and professional counselor training programs to incorporate expressive arts training into their curricula. Training modules may be created for courses in "Counselor Personality Competency Development," "Counseling Approaches and Techniques," or "Individual/Group Counseling Practice." This training may also function as a mechanism for ongoing professional growth for counselors, notably in refining reflective abilities, mitigating burnout, and increasing sensitivity to clients' emotional manifestations. Moreover, the findings of this study may serve as a foundation for creating expressive arts-based training guidelines or manuals that are customized to align with local Indonesian cultural values, including the principles of togetherness, mutual collaboration, and self-harmony.

This research may inform the Indonesian Guidance and Counseling Association (ABKIN) in enhancing counselor competency requirements by integrating creativity and

creative expression as measures of professionalism. These findings can guide the establishment of nationally accredited expressive arts-based counseling professional programs. This policy encourages educational institutions and the counseling community to develop training techniques that integrate

technical skills with reflective self-awareness. This study aims to enhance the Indonesian Creative Counselor Education Model by emphasizing a balance between professional competency and personal maturity through artistic inquiry and self-reflection.

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