

## Counseling Empathy in the Digital Era: Building Emotional Connections with Elementary School Students

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**Abstract:** This research was conducted to explore the impact of empathetic counseling using video call technology and specialized applications on elementary school students in addressing their emotional issues and enhancing their academic performance. The rapidly evolving digital era has brought complex challenges regarding the emotional well-being of children in elementary schools, making the role of counselors increasingly vital. The objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of empathetic counseling approaches through digital platforms in assisting students to overcome emotional problems and enhance their self-confidence. The research methodology involves an in-depth analysis of scientific publications related to empathetic counseling in the digital era, focusing on the empathetic counseling strategies implemented by counselors in the digital elementary school environment. The findings indicate that empathetic counseling approaches through video call technology and specialized applications have a positive impact, helping students feel heard, understood, and supported. However, the study also identifies limitations in involving parents' cooperation and technical aspects of using digital platforms.

**Keywords:** Empathetic Counseling, Digital Era, Emotional, Elementary School

### INTRODUCTION

The digital era has revolutionized human interaction patterns and access to information globally. Continuous technological advancements impact various aspects of human life, including education. Elementary school children, who are in a crucial stage of emotional and social development, significantly feel the effects of this technological progress (Manan, 2023). They grow up in an environment where digital devices and unlimited internet access are integral parts of daily life (Bastomi, 2019). Although technology brings enormous benefits in knowledge and learning opportunities, it also poses complex challenges, particularly in emotional and social aspects (Ristanti et al., 2023).

In the complexity of the digital era, the role of elementary school counselors becomes increasingly critical. Counselors must not only understand the dynamics of the digital world but also be capable of guiding children through their journey in facing the ever-evolving technological changes (Sabilla & Sutanti, 2023). In an environment of abundant information and complex online interactions, it is vital for counselors to establish strong emotional connections with students (Satyajati, 2019). The concept of empathetic counseling, involving a deep understanding of students' experiences and feelings, becomes key in assisting them to overcome emotional challenges, develop healthy digital literacy, and reach their full potential (Satyajati, 2019).

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a literature review method. It involves an in-depth analysis of scientific publications related to empathetic counseling in the digital era and the use of technology in an educational context. Data will be obtained through a careful and systematic

literature review on empathetic counseling strategies implemented by counselors in the digital environment of elementary schools. The research will focus on identifying patterns, trends, and best practices in building deep emotional connections with students in this digital era through a comprehensive literature review. This literature analysis will provide a solid theoretical foundation for understanding and evaluating empathetic counseling approaches in the digital context of elementary schools.

By understanding the vital role of counselors and exploring their best practices in the digital era context, this research aims to provide valuable insights for counseling practitioners, educators, and parents. Through empathetic counseling approaches and meticulous research methodology, we can guide elementary school children toward positive technology use, strengthen their social relations, and help them achieve success in this ever-evolving digital era.

## METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative design with a literature review method, focusing on the practice of empathetic counseling in the digital era within elementary school settings. The study encompasses scientific literature related to empathetic counseling, with data sources including scientific articles, books, and journals. Data analysis is conducted thematically to identify patterns, trends, and best practices in empathetic counseling in the digital era. The accuracy of the research findings is ensured through the selection of reliable and relevant data sources, and the validity of the results is strengthened through the evaluation of previous research methodologies. With this method, the research aims to provide a deep understanding of empathetic counseling in the digital era, particularly at the elementary school level, to support the development of more effective approaches in assisting students to overcome emotional problems and enhance their self-confidence.

## DISCUSSION

### Definition of Empathetic Counseling

Empathetic counseling is a counseling approach where the counselor not only listens to and understands the student's feelings but also emotionally empathizes with them (Haolah et al., 2018). In this context, the counselor creates a strong bond with the student, demonstrating a deep understanding of their feelings and providing support based on sensitivity to the student's emotional needs and experiences.

Empathetic counseling plays a crucial role in helping students overcome emotional issues by providing a safe environment where they feel heard, understood, and accepted (Satyajati, 2019). By empathizing with the student's emotions, the counselor can guide them through the process of self-expression, identifying the root of the problem, and developing strategies to overcome the emotional difficulties they face.

In the digital era, the concept of empathy remains fundamental but needs to be adapted to technological advancements. Counselors need to combine emotional intelligence with an understanding of technology to effectively comprehend and respond to students' feelings through digital media (Satyajati, 2019).

In the digital age, expressions of empathy can occur through various platforms, such as online chat, video calls, or online counseling applications. However, it's important to note that expressing empathy digitally requires additional skills, such as interpreting a student's tone through text, capturing emotional nuances through a camera, and understanding body language in a virtual context (Hartoyo et al., 2022).

In addressing students' emotional issues in the digital era, empathetic counseling remains a crucial foundation. Counselors must integrate emotional expertise with technology, ensuring that students feel empathized with and supported, even through digital media. With an empathetic counseling approach tailored to the digital age, students can feel supported and understood in addressing their emotional issues, helping them grow and develop in a balanced way in the ever-evolving digital world.

## Challenges in Building Emotional Connections in the Digital Era

In the digital era, dominated by social media and technology, establishing emotional connections between counselors and elementary school students has become increasingly complex. A major challenge is the influence of social media and technological devices, leading to increased social isolation and a reduction in real human interactions (Rahayu et al., 2023). Children spend considerable time in front of screens, accessing online content and engaging in digital interactions, which can diminish face-to-face interactions with peers and adults. This can hinder the development of social skills and empathy, as interactions in the digital environment tend to be less profound and filled with uncertainties.

Another challenge is creating an empathetic environment in the digital world. In face-to-face interactions, counselors can rely on facial expressions, body language, and voice to understand a student's feelings. However, in a digital environment, these expressions are limited and often not fully detailed (Anggraeni, 2017). Counselors have to rely on written words, emoticons, and tone in digital conversations, which may not always accurately reflect emotional nuances. Additionally, difficulty in understanding intonation and body language in a virtual context can hinder a counselor's ability to accurately empathize with a student's emotions, thus affecting the quality of the emotional connection that can be built.

The lack of human interaction in building emotional connections is also rooted in the "filter bubble" phenomenon on social media, where individuals tend to be exposed only to views and opinions that align with their own beliefs (Wulandari et al., 2021). This can reinforce a lack of understanding of others' perspectives and reduce empathetic abilities. Furthermore, the constant flow of information on social media can lead to apathy towards others' feelings, as individuals become accustomed to brief and often superficial glimpses.

To address these challenges, counselors in the digital era need to develop specialized skills for reading emotions through digital communication. They also need to create safe spaces in the digital environment, where students feel heard and valued, even if it's just through text or a video call. Additionally, education about healthy and empathetic use of social media is an important part of efforts to build meaningful emotional connections in the digital era (Bastomi, 2019).

## Methods of Empathetic Counseling in the Digital Era

In facing the challenges of the digital era, counselors adopt various empathetic counseling methods that utilize technology carefully and sensitively. A popular method is through video call sessions, allowing counselors and students to interact directly even from distant locations (Habibah et al., 2021). In video call sessions, the counselor's facial expressions and body language remain visible, enabling students to better read the counselor's emotional reactions, and vice versa. This creates a visual bond that can strengthen the emotional connection between the counselor and the student.

Apart from video calls, empathetic counseling sessions can also be conducted through online chats or text messages. Counselors using online chats adeptly can understand students' feelings through the words they use. Emphasis on the use of words and clear explanations helps counselors deeply understand students' concerns and emotions. In text chats, counselors can also pay attention to students' response speed, emoticons, and writing style to read between the lines and better sense the students' feelings (Romiaty et al., 2020).

Moreover, the use of specialized applications for empathetic counseling can provide a more structured and focused experience. These applications may include features like emotional journals, where students can record their daily feelings and experiences. Counselors can access these journals and respond with questions, feedback, or support. The use of applications also allows students to feel more anonymous and safe to share feelings that might be difficult to express in person.

Counselors' strategies in developing emotional sensitivity involve using deep listening skills and careful observation of students' words and expressions. They need to ask open-ended questions that encourage students to delve deeper into their feelings (Rofiq, 2018). Additionally, counselors need to develop the ability to read body language and facial expressions through video calls,

allowing them to sense students' emotions through physical expressions, even though it's through a screen.

Developing emotional sensitivity also involves understanding the cultural and social context of students. Counselors must understand the students' backgrounds, family values, and environmental influences to better respond to their feelings and experiences. This involves an approach based on diversity and inclusion, where counselors respect differences and respond sensitively to the unique needs of each student (Amalia, 2019).

By integrating technology with deep emotional sensitivity, counselors can create effective and meaningful empathetic counseling sessions in the digital era. This approach ensures that students feel heard, understood, and supported, even through digital platforms, helping them overcome emotional issues and grow positively in the ever-evolving digital world.

### **Benefits of Empathetic Counseling in Elementary Schools**

Empathetic counseling in elementary schools offers profound and extensive benefits, aiding students in overcoming emotional and social challenges and enhancing their academic achievement and overall success.

**Provision of Necessary Emotional Support:** At the elementary school age, children undergo various emotional and social changes that can impact their well-being. Some students may struggle with feelings of anxiety, fear, or worry. Empathetic counseling provides a safe space where students can talk about their feelings without fear of judgment or ridicule. An empathetic counselor can help them feel brave enough to discuss the issues they face, build self-confidence, and overcome any insecurities they may have (Fatchurrahman, 2018). Feeling heard and understood allows students to overcome anxious feelings and boost their self-confidence.

**Improvement in Social Skills and Self-Confidence:** Empathetic counseling helps students develop social skills through positive interactions with the counselor. In a supportive and non-pressurized environment, students can learn how to communicate clearly, listen empathetically, and understand others' perspectives. They can also practice conflict resolution skills and learn how to interact positively with peers (Aminah, 2018). Feeling supported and understood by the counselor, students become more confident in their interactions with others, building healthy relationships and overcoming confusing or anxious social situations.

**Positive Impact on Academic Achievement and Student Success:** Empathetic counseling not only has a positive impact on students' emotional and social aspects but also contributes to improved academic performance. By addressing emotional issues and boosting self-confidence, students can focus more on their learning in the classroom. They feel more motivated to attend school, participate actively in lessons, and interact with teachers and peers (Narti et al., 2023). Empathetic counseling helps create a supportive learning environment, guiding students in overcoming academic barriers, and providing a positive boost to their interest in learning and academic achievements (Wati & Afandi, 2021). Additionally, possessing good social skills and high self-confidence enables students to face academic challenges with a positive and self-assured attitude, which in turn increases their chances of success in various subjects (Fitriyanti et al., 2020).

Overall, empathetic counseling in elementary schools opens doors to healthy emotional, social, and academic development for students. By supporting students in overcoming emotional problems, strengthening social skills, and boosting self-confidence, empathetic counseling lays a solid foundation for positive growth and future success of students.

### **Literature Review Related to the Study**

The first and second relevant studies conducted by Andrianie et al. (2018) and Andrianie et al. (2017), provide significant insights into developing empathy skills in elementary school students through experiential learning-based empathy enhancement methods. These studies highlight the importance of recognizing bullying perpetrators from an empathy perspective and the need for preventive efforts from an early age. Through a quasi-experimental approach, these studies present

evidence that empathy training can lead to an improvement in students' empathy skills, which are crucial in minimizing bullying behavior.

The third relevant study by [Batubara & Ariani \(2018\)](#) discusses the implementation of guidance and counseling at Sungai Mai 5 Elementary School in Banjarmasin. Although this study does not directly relate to empathy enhancement methods, it underscores the importance of building empathic communication in counseling. The study emphasizes the need for a deep understanding of students, the integration of guidance and counseling materials into the curriculum, and the selection of appropriate methods and media to create empathic communication between counselors and students.

Together, these studies conclude that empathy training in elementary school students positively impacts reducing bullying behavior and enhancing students' social skills and self-confidence. The findings consistently highlight the importance of building empathy at an early stage and demonstrate that various methods, including experiential learning, can be effective in achieving this goal.

Overall, these research findings affirm that the development of empathy skills in the digital era is not only relevant but also critically necessary. Amid the challenges posed by technology and social media, empathy training becomes key in creating a safe, supportive, and empathetic school environment. In this context, previous research and significant findings pave the way for innovative and structured empathetic counseling approaches in the future, combining traditional wisdom with advancements in digital technology.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research underscore that empathetic counseling in elementary schools, particularly through the use of technology such as video calls and specialized applications, has a positive impact in helping students overcome emotional issues, build self-confidence, and enhance academic achievement. However, limitations of this study involve challenges in involving parents' cooperation and technical limitations in using digital platforms for empathetic counseling. For future research, it is recommended to address these limitations by actively involving parents in the counseling process, providing training for counselors to optimize the use of technology, and implementing a holistic approach that involves the entire school community to create a stronger empathetic environment.

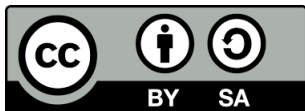
Further, subsequent research could explore the effectiveness of other empathetic counseling methods in the digital era and deepen understanding of how cultural and social factors influence the empathetic counseling process in elementary school environments. This exploration can provide a more comprehensive view of empathetic counseling's role and effectiveness in diverse educational settings, especially considering the evolving digital landscape and its impact on student behavior and learning. By addressing these aspects, future research can contribute to developing more effective and inclusive empathetic counseling practices that are adaptable to the changing needs of students and educational environments.

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