



Application of Benchmarking Strategies in Improving The Performance of Teacher Guidance and Counseling in Schools

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ARTICLE INFO:

Received

September 19, 2025

Revised

September 28, 2025

Accepted

November 05, 2025

KEYWORDS:

Benchmarking Strategy, Teacher Guidance and Counseling, Teacher Performance

How to Cite:

Niki Kusaini, U., & Kusumawati, K. (2025). Application of Benchmarking Strategies in Improving The Performance of Teacher Guidance and Counseling in Schools. *Ghaidan: Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling Islam Dan Kemasyarakatan*, 9(2).
<https://doi.org/10.19109/pf01ms34>

Published by:

UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

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ABSTRACT

The services provided by Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers must be aligned with student needs and supported by school principals to enhance the performance of BK teachers, enabling them to be more innovative and competitive in addressing student problems. This study aims to identify and analyze the BK program that implements a benchmarking strategy at SMA Bina Ilmi and SMK Muhammadiyah 2. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, collecting data through observations, interviews with 10 principals and 15 BK teachers, and documentation. The validity of the data was ensured through source and method triangulation. Benchmarking formulation involved aligning BK's vision, mission, and goals, analyzing the strategic environment, selecting benchmarking themes and target schools, and forming benchmarking teams. Cultural factors, BK teacher capacity, and costs were considered in data selection. The effectiveness of the benchmarking strategy was observed through improvements in BK teachers' abilities to identify and analyze student needs using standardized BK instruments, the provision of student-friendly counseling spaces, and the teachers' innovation in service delivery. The findings indicate that the benchmarking strategy effectively enhanced BK teachers' performance at both schools.

INTRODUCTION

From the philosophical perspective of constructivism, learning activities in the educational process are an effort to build understanding not only for students but also for teachers, emphasizing that knowledge is necessary to make the civilization of a nation and state through various activities that are not only theoretical but also practical. This knowledge construction occurs due to a consensus of social relations, individual constructivism, and social constructivism (Parwati et al., 2023). Learning activities are carried out to develop prior knowledge for students, which serves as a benchmark or foundation for developing their potential.

Education is a humanism process known as an effort to humanize humans (Pristiwanti et al., 2022). This is a process that lasts throughout life as an effort to balance internal and external conditions (Baharun & Ummah, 2018). Education also aims to shape students into individuals with personality and humanity, as well as become members of society who can educate themselves

according to the character of the society, while reducing difficulties or obstacles to development in life (Hildayanti et al., 2023). Education is currently faced with the era of the Industrial Revolution 5.0; Therefore, an education system is needed to foster a creative, innovative, and competitive generation. Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of education are non-negotiable. The dynamics of the development of educational institutions will continue to develop along with changes in the internal and external environment.

Teachers hold a central position and role in the overall effort to achieve quality education. Teachers are the spearhead that greatly determines the entire education system and should receive primary attention. Many parties are trying to significantly improve the quality of education by supporting teachers in developing their professional skills and competencies to a higher level. In other words, improving the quality of education must start with the teacher. As professional educators, teachers are required to have strong competencies. If the teacher's competence is good, it is hoped that their performance in teaching will also be good, which will improve the quality of education in schools. The success of a learning process is highly determined by the quality or ability of teachers (Sanjaya, 2006). Fun learning is the interaction between teachers and students, the physical environment, and the atmosphere provide opportunities for creating conducive learning conditions (H. Nugroho et al., 2024). A pleasant learning climate stimulates enthusiasm and fosters students' activities and creativity (Majid, 2005).

According to Mashudi & Nurmalasari (2023), mentorship is assistance provided to students to help them find their self-identity, understand their environment, and plan for their future. Guidance is also a process of helping individuals understand themselves and the surrounding environment to use their abilities and talents optimally. Therefore, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers play an important role in helping students, especially at Bina Ilmi High School. Schools that implement the Independent Learning curriculum are required to carry out projects that aim to improve the profile of Pancasila Students, which are developed based on specific themes that are in line with the learning achievement targets. BK teachers explain current phenomena through question-and-answer sessions and discussions during counseling activities, training students to adapt to issues that arise. In this way, students understand that BK teachers are very important in providing academic and non-academic services. By handling student problems, it is hoped that they will achieve better performance and learning outcomes.

Benchmarking in guidance and counseling involves comparing the quality of services provided in one school with those in another. If a BK teacher feels that the school is not paying enough attention to counseling services, they can propose benchmarking to the principal so that areas of weakness can be identified and improved.

Research on comparison in education is still relatively rare, as comparison is more often associated with business and economics. However, benchmarking can also be applied in educational research. Comparative practices are generally external and functional; to achieve total quality in an organization, it must be implemented optimally, professionally, and proportionately (B. H. Nugroho & Jaqin, 2021). Benchmarking is a sustainable activity designed to get maximum benefits in improving the quality of human resources (NASIR, 2011). It is a continuous comparison method that aims to improve the organization's quality to achieve the best results (Raihana, 2025). Benchmarking is also an effort to improve institutional quality by testing standards that have been, are running, and will be developed in educational institutions (Goswami et al., n.d.). Benchmarking functions as a tool to improve the quality of an organization—whether producing goods or providing services—by comparing its quality standards with other organizations (Cahyana, 2010).

Benchmarking involves monitoring, active commitment, information competence, and evaluation to realize progress in implementing standard plans (Sumarto, 2019). Through supervision, exemplary leadership, and institutional evaluation, the quality of education can be improved (Al Kamil & Putridiyanti, 2020). In this activity, the role of the principal is vital in

monitoring teachers (Tandisau et al., 2022). Thus, education must be managed by a leader who can direct the family, society, and government through guidance, teaching, and training activities inside and outside the school, allowing students to take appropriate roles in their future environment (Yulmawati, 2016). For this reason, the principal implements a benchmarking strategy involving all institution members, including teachers, students, parents, school committees, and the community. If this is implemented correctly, the quality of education can be improved. Educational institutions can do this through leadership roles in human resource planning, recruitment, performance appraisal, compensation policies, work motivation, teaching quality improvement, and human resource development (Fauzi, 2018).

There is much literature on the construction of strategies for comparison, where objective functions often include implicit or explicit utility functions (Al-Aradi & Jaimungal, 2018; Basak et al., 2006; Bernard & Vanduffel, 2014; Gerrard et al., 2019, 2023; Lim & Wong, 2010; Nicolosi et al., 2018; Oderda, 2015) or aim to punish poor performance while encouraging better performance (Basak et al., 2006; Bernard & Vanduffel, 2014; Brown & Lent, 2013). Van Staden, Forsyth, & Li (2023) analyze optimal dynamic strategies associated with two popular goals: maximizing information ratios and achieving favorable tracking differences relative to benchmarks. Difference tracking is recognized as an important and intuitive metric for performance evaluation (Boyde, 2021; ETF.com, 2021; Pioneer, 2014). Thus, the comparison can be used for future evaluation and methodological development (Shaukat et al., 2022).

Observations at SMA Bina Ilmi Palembang and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang show apparent differences. Bina Ilmi High School is a relatively high-quality school, preferred by the people in Ilir Barat I Regency, with many graduates pursuing higher education at prestigious universities throughout Indonesia, such as Yogyakarta State University, Sriwijaya University, Sriwijaya State Polytechnic, Indonesian Education University, Sebelas Maret University, and Jakarta State University. However, the school has only one BK teacher compared to a large student population, resulting in limited counseling services, non-standardized counseling rooms, and a BK program that does not fully meet the needs of students.

Benchmarking activities in this study were carried out between SMA Bina Ilmi Palembang and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang, located in Palembang, South Sumatra. SMA Bina Ilmi is a private Islamic senior high school that aims to provide quality education integrating Islamic values and general knowledge. However, it currently has limited BK facilities and staff, and requires development in its guidance and counseling program. On the other hand, SMK Muhammadiyah 2 is a reputable vocational school in the Seberang Ulu 1 District with comprehensive BK services, including three BK teachers, standardized counseling rooms, and BK graduates with strong psychology knowledge. The contrasting conditions of these schools provide an ideal basis for benchmarking, as SMA Bina Ilmi can learn from the more advanced BK practices at SMK Muhammadiyah 2. This comparison is intended to help improve BK teacher performance and the overall counseling program at SMA Bina Ilmi by adopting practical, innovative, and student-centered strategies identified at SMK Muhammadiyah 2.

The instrumentation results obtained through benchmarking can then be observed, interpreted, and used to provide accurate BK services (Devianti & Sari, 2020, p. 72). Tohirin (in Devianti & Sari, 2020:72) states that the success of counseling services in schools depends on the data obtained from the instrument. This principle is reinforced by Prayitno (in Devianti & Sari, 2020:72), who argues that the majority of instrument results can indicate whether or not services should be provided to students. Therefore, this study examines the importance of benchmarking in improving the performance of Guidance and Counseling teachers in schools.

METHODS

Research Design

The focus of this research is a benchmarking strategy in improving the performance of Guidance and Counseling teachers. The approach used in this study is a qualitative research approach to uncover specific social situations by accurately describing reality, built through words, based on relevant data collection and analysis techniques obtained from natural settings (Ghony & Almansur, 2012: 26). The researcher uses a qualitative approach because the object of the research takes place in a natural context and aims to thoroughly explore, understand, and examine how benchmarking strategies improve the performance of Guidance and Counseling teachers.

Procedure

The research was conducted at SMA Bina Ilmi Palembang, located at Jl. Letjend Alamsyah Ratu Prawira Negara No. 88, Palembang, and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang, located at Jl. A. Yani Silaberanti, Seberang Ulu I District, Palembang City, South Sumatra, 30252. These two locations were selected based on the successful implementation of the benchmarking strategy in both institutions.

Data sources include people, events, locations, and documents to achieve research objectives. The data collection techniques in this study consisted of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The researcher observed participants in the field for several months to obtain accurate information related to the research theme. The researchers also interviewed principals, vice principals, teachers, and students to reinforce the observations. The results of the interviews were then cross-checked with the accounts of several informants to ensure the validity of the data. In addition, researchers documented various aspects that were considered significant.

Data collection and analysis

Considering that this study uses a multi-problem study design, data analysis was carried out in two stages, namely:

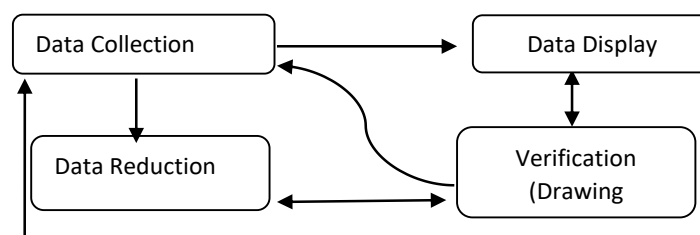


Figure 1. Data Analysis Techniques (Miles & Huberman, 2014)

Cross-problematic data analysis refers to comparing the findings obtained by researchers from each problem area and integrating them across problem areas. For more clarity on cross-problematic data analysis, see the diagram below:

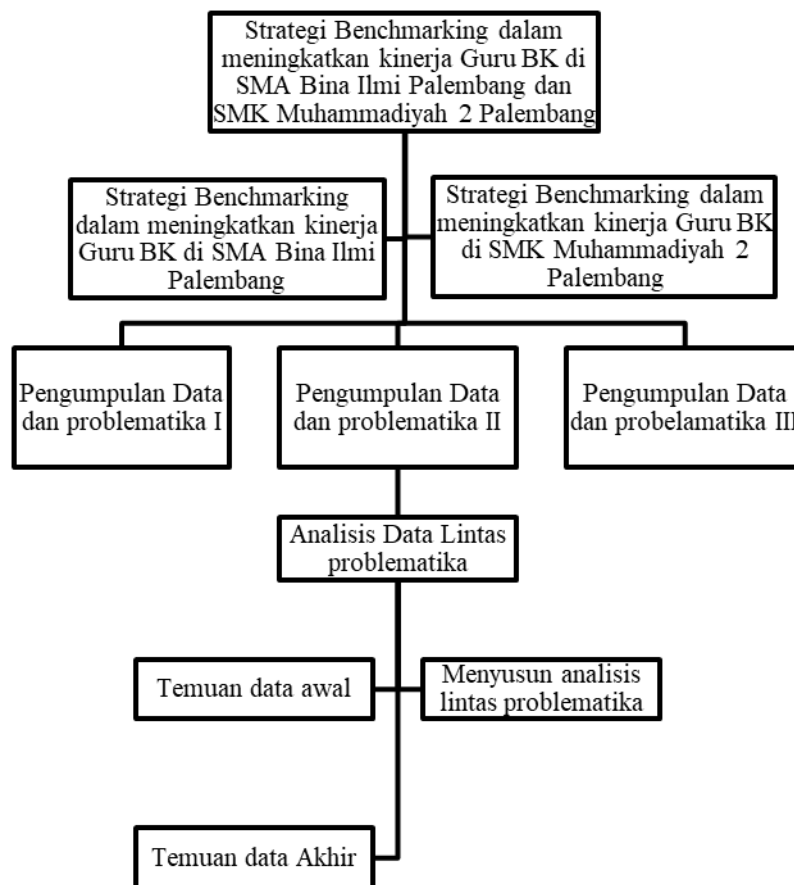


Figure 2. Cross-Problems Data Analysis

The researcher carried out the benchmarking strategy as a deliberate comparative study to improve the performance of Guidance and Counseling (GC) teachers at SMA Bina Ilmi Palembang by comparing them with their counterparts at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang. This strategy involved direct engagement through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and intensive communication between the two schools, aimed at sharing good practices and identifying areas for improvement. The primary data sources in this study were school principals and BK teachers from both schools. Specifically, interviews were conducted to gather information on the planning, implementation, and challenges faced in the BK programs and teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of benchmarking in improving service delivery. The interview aspects included evaluation of counseling program management, use of standardized instruments, teacher competency development, and student counseling outcomes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of the study show that the implementation of benchmarking strategies to improve the performance of Guidance and Counseling teachers at SMA Bina Ilmi and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang includes:

Formulation of Benchmarking Strategies in Improving the Performance of Teacher Guidance and Counseling in Schools

A comprehensive benchmarking strategy is a planning activity based on broad insights to predict all possible future scenarios. This strategic activity cannot be separated from the principal's role as a conceptualizer and driver of all support systems in the implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools.

The various challenges faced by Guidance and Counselling (GC) teachers include their inability to make decisions regarding the types of changes to implement in schools, experiences of professional isolation and loneliness, heavy workloads, ineffective staffing, and the expectations of parents, staff, and students ([Earley et al., 2011](#); [Fullan, 2001](#); [Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996](#); [Woodley, 2018](#)).

In carrying out the benchmarking strategy on October 2, 2023, at Bina Ilmi High School with GC teachers and principals, several aspects need to be considered. Oriented to the vision and mission of guidance and counseling in schools. Guidance and counseling in schools must use the vision and mission as a guideline for developing services. The designed service should be responsive and adaptive to possible future circumstances, educating students to be individuals of good character and productivity. This aligns with the vision and mission of SMA Bina Ilmi Palembang and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang, which have the same essence: to grow Muslim students with high achievements.

Some selected high schools' missions emphasize teaching students to respect people, thoughts, freedom, morality, and cultural heritage ([Gürses et al., 2011](#)). They also acquire knowledge and skills related to religious services such as leading prayers, delivering sermons, and teaching Qur'an courses ([Official Gazette, 2009](#)).

Each school has its own characteristics. These characteristics can be a strength for institutions. Therefore, a comparative strategy should be applied by those who fully understand their school's unique character and conditions, which can be examined through the analysis of the internal and external environment. One method that can be used is a SWOT analysis. SWOT analysis is a tool to identify internal and external factors of the school ([Kurniadin & Machali, 2012](#)). Internal factors include the strengths and weaknesses of the school, while external factors consist of opportunities and threats.

Forming Teamwork

The benchmarking team was formed based on the expertise of the Guidance and Counseling (GC) teacher. Through the team's division, collecting information from the measured schools became more focused on guidance and counseling. Teamwork is one of the efforts to divide work into smaller, simpler tasks in separate activities, in which GC teachers specialize at each level. In this way, productivity increases through the specialization of the job.

Professional development can be defined as any activity deliberately designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes of GC teachers, which will improve students' academic achievement ([Guskey, 2000](#); [Louck-Horsley et al., 2009](#)).

Choosing a Superior School as a Benchmark

Benchmarking strategies require collaboration between both parties to exchange information. This information is then processed and used to develop guidance and counseling services in schools that conduct benchmarking studies. The comparison school is looking for a model for the school of the future. For this reason, the leading institutions that are the target of benchmarking must function as leaders. Therefore, it is unsurprising that both Bina Ilmi High School and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang choose benchmarking partners from schools whose achievements have reached the national level. The focus on accessing reputable public institutions is also supported by the well-documented financial benefits of attending a public university for four years ([Chetty, Friedman, Saez, Turner, & Yagan, 2017](#); [Hoekstra, 2009](#); [Smith, Goodman, & Hurwitz, 2020](#)).

Determining a Benchmarking Topic

The benchmarking topic is generally determined by aligning the school's condition with the condition of the benchmarking partner school. These considerations are usually based on the school's unique aspects, which are expected to provide new information that has not yet been published. At this stage, preparation is required in the form of interview guidelines, questionnaires, or documentation. Benchmarking partners must also know the information they are looking for so that the collaboration can be mutually beneficial for both parties.

Implementation of Benchmarking in Improving the Performance of Teacher Guidance and Counseling in Schools

The results of benchmarking cannot be applied directly in schools. As previously explained, implementing benchmarking results must be communicated and carefully considered. The first consideration is the culture of the school. School culture represents the character and identity of the institution that must be preserved. Wagner (2004) states that school culture is not a demographic description related to race, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. Every school reflects its culture, and the principal is responsible for effectively visualizing and communicating that culture (Brown & Medford, 2022). Although little attention has been paid to how new principals manage the inherited school culture, shaping the school culture is one of the biggest challenges for principals (Lee-Piggott, 2016).

Therefore, the school's culture must be maintained, as long as it is a positive culture that serves as its strength. As highlighted in the FGD and interviews conducted on October 9, 2023, at SMA Bina Ilmi and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang, both schools emphasize maintaining Islamic character and decency. However, some high-performing benchmark schools encourage more freedom among students. Both schools chose to maintain their identities. It is important to understand that not all benchmarking results are suitable for immediate adoption; instead, they need to be customized, further developed, and refined.

Similarly, Khoshbakht, Gou, and Dupre (2018) emphasize that benchmarking represents a set of performance metrics, serving as a reference point and threshold for performance evaluation. Benchmarking can be formulated as an imitation with modifications. This means that improvements, modifications, and improvisations are required in applying the comparison results, with consideration for the school's culture, budgeting, and resource readiness.

This has been discussed above from a cultural perspective. However, from a financial perspective, it is not easy to achieve uniformity. State-of-the-art and comprehensive facilities have not yet been fully adopted. The most significant contribution obtained from the benchmarking study in both schools lies in improving the performance of Guidance and Counseling (GC) teachers. The implementation of benchmarking results has led to a change in performance.

This is evident at Bina Ilmi Palembang High School, where GC teachers have successfully nurtured outstanding students, enabling them to participate in the national-level Olympics in Palembang, South Sumatra. The enthusiasm and tireless efforts of the teachers in coaching show a strong commitment to developing students' potential. Meanwhile, SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang benefits from benchmarking insights to improve its dual curriculum, gaining perspectives from schools outside the city, such as MBS Yogyakarta, especially in programs such as tahfidz, inclusivity, and the Vocational Guidance Bureau (BKK). This aligns with the findings of Chen et al. (2023) and Huggins & Izushi (2009), who argue that benchmarking indicators are an effective technique for measuring performance against a defined set of indicators.

Achieving the goals of guidance and counseling requires cooperation, mutual support, and influence, all realized through effective communication. Control is more effective if it is carried out through intensive communication between school leaders and GC teachers. Communication helps build mutual understanding and mutual meaning. Through such communication, the performance

of GC teachers can be more easily directed by school leaders, and the services provided to students can be more aligned with their needs. Communication also benefits intellectual and social development, self-awareness, understanding of reality, and mental health ([Supratic, 2009](#)).

Thus, intensive communication between the principal and GC teachers has implications for the desired change in work patterns (performance). This practice is proven at SMA Bina Ilmi Palembang and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang, where communication is formally and informally maintained. Formal communication is done through weekly and monthly meetings. In contrast, informal communication occurs through interpersonal relationships, especially for GC teachers facing problems, violations, or discipline issues, and in relationships with parents. For example, in the tahfidz program, parents also monitor students' muroja'ah at home. In addition, the principal exercises control through coaching and training to improve his subordinates' competence.

Proposed Propositions

The formulation of this research proposition focuses on: 1) how benchmarking strategies improve the performance of guidance and counseling teachers in schools; 2) how the implementation of benchmarking improves the performance of guidance and counseling teachers in schools; 3) how benchmarking control improves the performance of guidance and counseling teachers in schools.

Through a comparison strategy, schools can easily obtain information to develop a vision of the school. These insights were obtained because the benchmarking partner had agreed to share information about the secrets of his school's success. These insights will later produce innovations in the educational process for benchmarking schools. Benchmarking allows schools to gain new perspectives on standard practices, identify goals of excellence, and serve as a medium for improvement and breakthroughs ([Arcaro, 2006](#)).

The latest innovations obtained through benchmarking strategies are greatly influenced by the initial planning that underlies benchmarking implementation. Effective planning relies heavily on a well-prepared strategy. To establish a good plan, it is necessary to conduct an environmental analysis because the strategy requires precise data and information derived from an ecological study. The guidance and counseling teacher must understand the analysis to align the intended goal with the target, the ability to improve their performance in school. Therefore, the comparison strategy should be comprehensive, with results that serve as a reference to explain a more specific plan towards a broader goal.

The results of the benchmarking are expected to inspire the development of school work plans. Based on this explanation, the principal has acted as a concept. Meanwhile, guidance and counseling teachers at Bina Ilmi High School and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang have performed their functions as effectively as possible. Thus, the benchmarking strategy of school guidance and counseling teachers is carried out comprehensively. It can be formulated into the proposition that the benchmarking strategy can create innovations in the educational process when it is comprehensively planned in line with the school's vision, mission, and goals.

The benchmarking results are followed up by communicating them to guidance and counseling school teachers through the perspective of opportunities or threats if the programs resulting from benchmarking are implemented. However, no matter how successful a program is at an exemplary school, it may not always be adopted similarly in other schools due to different characteristics and cultures. Other considerations include the availability of qualified guidance and counseling teachers and financial factors.

Exemplary schools that serve as benchmarking destinations usually already have recognition and branding, so funding is not a significant obstacle—especially for private schools free to seek funding from various sources. Participation in benchmarking also expands the knowledge and motivation of guidance and counseling teachers to achieve excellent results.

The results of benchmarking can be applied both individually and collectively. The emphasis is on behavior change and commitment. At the same time, they collectively pertain to guidance and counseling programs or agendas, whether monthly, semester-based, or yearly, that are typically found in school counseling administration. Thus, implementing benchmarking strategies can produce breakthroughs that further optimize the performance and productivity of guidance and counseling teachers in schools.

One of the results from the benchmarking activity was the enthusiasm and motivation among guidance and counseling teachers. They were aware of their shortcomings and inspired to be more proactive in empowering their abilities.

The second proposition states that applying benchmarking will result in a high-quality guidance and counseling program if the benchmarking results are managed in an adaptive and selective manner, adjusted to the ability of guidance and counseling teachers, student needs, and school financial capacity.

In strategy control or evaluation, two-way communication is indispensable. One common form of communication is meetings. Therefore, in the controlling strategy, openness from various parties is needed. In addition, flexible communication is more acceptable, considering that each guidance and counseling teacher has different characteristics. Warnings should not hurt feelings or reduce motivation, but should be constructive, encouraging awareness, and improving work performance. Therefore, a principal must have strong interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are the tendency to show attention, understanding, and concern for the feelings of others.

At SMA Bina Ilmi and SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang, meetings between guidance and counseling teachers were very intensive. SMA Bina Ilmi holds meetings every Monday and Saturday, while SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Palembang often organizes internal training and coaching sessions for guidance and counseling teachers. This includes coaching in preparing annual programs, preparing lesson plans (RPLs), and even creating AI-based materials that students enjoy. Such intensive meetings naturally serve as a forum for self-evaluation of the school, which can improve the knowledge and performance of its staff.

The third proposition is that controlling benchmarking strategies has implications for improving the performance of guidance and counseling teachers in conducting open, flexible, and intensive communication with students in schools while providing opportunities for students to develop their potential through group tutoring and individual counseling.

In general, the systematics of benchmarking strategies in improving the performance of guidance and counseling teachers—to become innovative and competitive—can be illustrated by integrating annual counseling programs that are aligned with the needs of students, as follows:

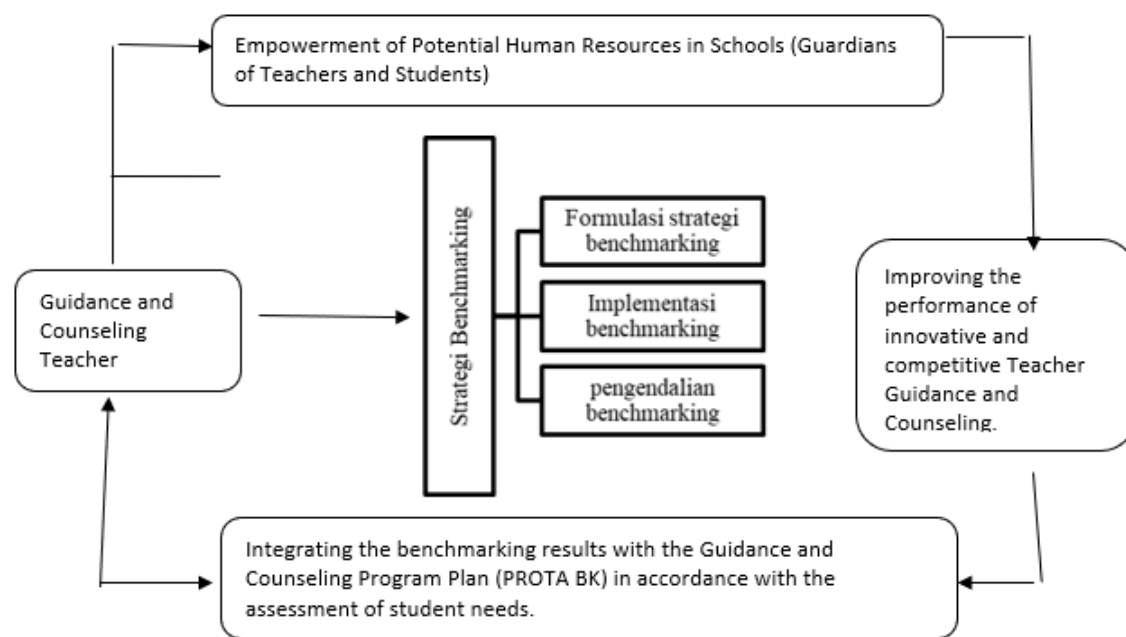


Figure 3. Benchmarking Strategies in Improving the Performance of Teacher Guidance and Counseling in Schools

Guidance and Counseling teachers will empower their potential in school and improve their performance to be more innovative and competitive by using benchmarking strategies, which include benchmarking formulation, implementation, and control, as well as integrating benchmarking results with annual guidance and counseling programs according to student needs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the benchmarking strategy to improve the performance of Guidance and Counseling teachers is carried out comprehensively through: 1) aligning with the vision, mission, and goals of the school, 2) analyzing the strategic environment, 3) determining benchmarking topics, 4) choosing outstanding schools as benchmarking targets, and 5) forming a benchmarking team. The application of benchmarking in schools uses interview/discussion, observation, and documentation methods to collect data. The data obtained from the benchmarking study were then adapted and selected, considering several factors, including culture, capacity of Guidance and Counseling teachers, and budgeting, while adhering to the principle of maintaining good practices and adopting new and better practices.

Benchmarking control in improving the performance of Guidance and Counseling teachers in schools is carried out through intensive communication between the Principal, Guidance and Counseling teachers, and all school stakeholders. This makes implementing the strategy more effective because it can detect potential obstacles teachers face early on. The openness and flexibility of the Principal also serve as an essential principle in meeting the needs of subordinates. Thus, through intensive, open, and flexible control of the Principal, a mutually beneficial relationship is established between the Principal and the Guidance and Counseling teachers.

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