

Integration of Pastoral Counseling in Theological Education: Qualitative Research in Building Counselor Competence

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of integrating pastoral counseling into theological education to build a more holistic and effective church counselor competence. Although some theological education institutions have included pastoral counseling in their curriculum, many still focus on teaching theory without addressing the practical skills needed for church ministry. This study reveals that combining psychological and theological principles in theological education can help prepare church leaders who are better equipped to handle the emotional and spiritual challenges of the congregation. The research method used is qualitative, based on in-depth interviews and documentation. With a more comprehensive and practice-based approach, theological education can equip future church counselors with the skills necessary to provide more effective and relevant support. Therefore, this study recommends that churches and theological educational institutions collaborate in designing a more innovative curriculum to enhance the quality of pastoral counseling services.

Keywords:

pastoral counseling; theological education; church counselor competence;
integration of theology and psychology; practical training

INTRODUCTION

Pastoral counseling is an integral part of church ministry that is not only concerned with spiritual guidance but also emotional and psychological support for congregants (Collins, 2007). In recent decades, the need for competent church counselors has increased along with the challenges faced by congregants in daily life. When many individuals face emotional difficulties, trauma, and other life crises, the church becomes an important place to seek healing and guidance (Clinebell, 1984). Therefore, church leaders and pastoral counselors need to have adequate competencies to meet these needs (Crabb, 2001). However, many theological educations have not fully incorporated pastoral

counseling in their curriculum, thus posing a challenge for churches to prepare qualified counselors (Tan, 2007).

As the understanding of the relationship between theology and psychology develops, pastoral counseling has begun to take a more significant place in theological education (McMinn, 2011). Some studies show that the integration of the two can improve the quality of pastoral care, where church counselors not only explore theological aspects, but also understand the psychological aspects of the congregation (Vanhoozer, 2005). Thus, it is important to discuss how theological education can integrate pastoral counseling, especially to build the competencies needed by church counselors (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001). This is expected to make a significant contribution to the church in facing modern challenges, especially related to congregational mental health (Jones, 2014). This integration also provides an opportunity to form a more holistic church counselor, who can respond to the needs of the congregation from various sides.

As part of this effort, it is important to understand the challenges faced by churches in providing effective pastoral counseling. One of the main challenges is the lack of in-depth training in counseling in many theological schools (Shaw, 2005). Most theological education programs focus more on teaching doctrine and church leadership, while pastoral counseling is often considered a non-essential addition (Powlison, 2007). In fact, the ability to deal with the emotional and psychological problems of the congregation is very important in pastoral ministry (Tournier, 2006). This study aims to explore more deeply how pastoral counseling can be integrated in theological education to overcome these problems.

The integration of pastoral counseling in theological education has the potential to form church leaders who are better prepared to face the challenges of ministry (Hill, 2004). This approach requires theological education to broaden their horizons, not only in theological aspects but also in psychology and counseling (Wicks, 2000). By adopting counseling principles based on a sound psychological approach, pastors and church leaders can better understand and assist congregants in dealing with various emotional crises that often arise in their lives (Van der Kolk, 2014). Therefore, this integration not only benefits the individual development of the congregation, but also enriches the ministry of the church as a whole (McMinn, 2011). As a result, pastoral counseling can be a very effective tool for spiritual and emotional healing in the church context.

Theological education that does not integrate pastoral counseling in its curriculum risks producing church leaders who are ill-prepared to deal with the complexity of congregational problems (Hunsinger, 1993). This can reduce the effectiveness of church services, especially in dealing with daily life issues that require a more practical and counseling skills-based approach (Robinson, 2014). The integration of pastoral counseling can also introduce counseling methods and techniques that are more relevant to the needs of today's congregations, which are increasingly diverse and complex (Powlison, 2007). Thus, it is important for theological education institutions to adapt their curricula to include pastoral counseling training that fits the needs of the times (Palmer, 1998). This is an important step towards creating church counselors who not only understand the scriptures, but are also able to provide the emotional and psychological support needed by the congregation.

On the other hand, some studies show that an understanding of pastoral counseling in the church context must also be followed by a deep understanding of the social and cultural aspects of the congregation (Crabb, 2001). For this reason, theological education programs need to include elements related to teaching pastoral counseling that is sensitive to the cultural and social context of the congregation. With this approach, church counselors can better understand the social dynamics of congregants that may affect the problems they face, such as domestic violence, addictions, or mental disorders (Tournier, 2006). This holistic approach is expected to equip church counselors with broader skills in providing guidance that suits the needs of each individual (Collins, 2007). Therefore, it is important for the church to realize that pastoral counseling should be conducted with full attention to the social and cultural context.

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of integrating pastoral counseling in theological education to build the competence of church counselors (Glanzer & Lingenfelter, 2003). This research also aims to provide a clearer picture of how it can be implemented in the theological education curriculum, as well as the challenges faced in the integration process (Jones, 2014). Through this research, it is hoped that solutions can be found to overcome these challenges and provide recommendations to improve the quality of theological education in terms of pastoral counseling (Wicks, 2000). Given the importance of pastoral counseling in church ministry, this research becomes relevant to address the need for church leaders who are more skilled in dealing with the emotional and spiritual problems of the congregation. Thus, the results of this

study are expected to make a positive contribution to the development of theological education and pastoral care in the church.

This research will present an in-depth analysis of the need to integrate pastoral counseling in theological education and how this can enrich the competencies of church counselors (Benner, 2003). In addition, the research will also provide guidance for theological education in designing a more comprehensive curriculum, which includes more structured pastoral counseling skills (Shaw, 2005). It is hoped that with this development, church counselors will be better prepared to face the increasingly complex challenges in congregational life and provide more effective support.

OVERVIEW

Pastoral counseling is an integral part of church ministry that combines spiritual guidance with psychological approaches to support congregants in dealing with various life issues. According to Clinebell (1984), pastoral counseling focuses on the emotional and spiritual healing aspects needed by individuals in the context of their faith. Meanwhile, Collins (2007) explains that pastoral counseling should be done with an approach that is sensitive to the emotional needs of the congregation, while still maintaining a strong theological foundation. This creates space for pastoral counselors to play a role in the healing process through the integration of religious values and psychology. Therefore, it is important for theological education to include training in pastoral counseling to ensure the quality of church ministry.

Effective theological education should pay attention to the development of pastoral counseling, especially in developing the practical skills needed by church counselors. Tan (2007) points out that traditional theological education often focuses more on teaching doctrine and systematic theology, while pastoral counseling training is often considered a less important complement. This can affect the ability of church leaders to provide appropriate guidance to congregants facing emotional and psychological problems. In response to this, many scholars have begun to highlight the importance of integrating pastoral counseling in the theological education curriculum, in order to prepare church leaders who are more competent in dealing with congregational life issues (McMinn, 2011). This approach provides the dual benefits of enriching the quality of theology teaching and enhancing pastoral counseling skills.

The integration of pastoral counseling and theological education can create a balance between spiritual guidance and emotional support needed by the congregation. According to Powlison (2007), good pastoral counseling does not only rely on theological understanding, but must also understand human psychology to be able to address deeper issues, such as depression, anxiety, or trauma. This use of psychological theories in pastoral counseling is very important, as it can give church counselors greater insight in dealing with the emotional challenges of the congregation (Vanhoozer, 2005). On the other hand, Hill (2004) argues that the teaching of pastoral counseling in theological education needs to be tailored to the specific church context, to ensure that the methods used are relevant to the needs of the congregation. Thus, this integration must be done carefully, so as not to reduce the spiritual depth of pastoral ministry.

In the development of theological education, it is important to consider various counseling models and theories that can be applied in the church context. Crabb (2001) suggests that churches adopt a counseling approach that focuses on biblical understanding as a foundation for providing guidance that is in line with Christian teachings. However, according to Tournier (2006), this approach should also consider practical aspects of counseling, such as effective communication, listening skills, and emotional management. An integrative model that combines psychology, pastoral counseling, and biblical teachings can be a very effective alternative in addressing congregants' emotional problems. By combining theological and psychological approaches, pastoral counseling can have a deeper and lasting impact on the individuals served.

Previous studies have shown that many church leaders feel ill-equipped to deal directly with congregants' psychological problems (Shaw, 2005). Although many pastors and church leaders have a deep understanding of church doctrines and teachings, many are not trained in providing effective counseling (Jones, 2014). This suggests a gap in theological education that needs to be addressed by integrating pastoral counseling training in the existing curriculum. For example, Robinson (2014) proposed that theological education should include pastoral counseling modules that not only teach theory but also provide practical skills in handling congregational crises. This integration will strengthen the ability of church leaders to provide more holistic emotional and spiritual support.

In addition, it is important to highlight how pastoral counseling plays a role in healing trauma and deep feelings in the lives of congregants. Van der Kolk (2014) explains that trauma often leads to mental disorders that can affect an individual's relationship with God and others. In this case, pastoral counseling can be an effective means of healing, with an approach that includes an understanding of the trauma and its impact. Benner (2003) also adds that pastoral counseling should consider the spiritual dimension in the healing process, with the ultimate goal of helping individuals to find peace and recovery. By understanding these two aspects-psychological and spiritual-church counselors can be more effective in providing help.

Developing the competencies of church counselors also requires attention to the social and cultural challenges faced by congregations. Powlison (2007) suggests that pastoral counselors need to have a high awareness of the social and cultural background of the congregation, so that they can provide more sensitive and relevant guidance. For example, in some cultures, issues such as divorce or addiction can be very sensitive, so pastoral counselors need to understand the socio-cultural context in order to provide appropriate help (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001). In this regard, theological education should include counseling elements that equip students with an understanding of how to deal with complex social issues in the church. Thus, pastoral counseling will be more acceptable and beneficial to congregants from diverse backgrounds.

Pastoral counseling in the church context must also respond to new challenges that arise in modern society, such as stress from digital life and shifting social values (Wilson, 2011). As technology develops, many church members are facing new challenges related to social media addiction, privacy issues, and other social pressures. Tan (2007) suggested that theological education pay special attention to these issues by including counseling topics relevant to the digital context. Therefore, pastoral counseling should adopt a more modern and flexible approach, to be able to deal with new issues that arise among the congregation. This approach will help the church remain relevant in providing support for congregants in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with the aim to explore in depth the integration of pastoral counseling in theological education. This approach was chosen

because it allows researchers to understand more complex phenomena, such as the challenges and opportunities faced in incorporating pastoral counseling into their curriculum (McMinn, 2011). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 (twelve) theological education lecturers, church leaders, and pastoral counselors who are directly involved in church ministry. The research took place at the Indonesian College of Theology Jakarta, Widya Agape College of Theology Malang, and Bethel Indonesia Church Jemaat Rajawali North Jakarta. The interviews aimed to obtain their views on the importance of pastoral counseling in theological education as well as the challenges they face in integrating it (Collins, 2007). In addition to the interviews, document analysis was also conducted to examine the curriculum of theological education in 2 theological colleges that have started to integrate pastoral counseling as part of their curriculum.

In this study, data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, where the researcher identified key themes that emerged from the interviews and documents collected (Powlison, 2007). This technique helped the researcher to understand different perspectives related to the needs and expectations towards pastoral counseling in theological education. In addition, the validity of the data was tested through triangulation, by comparing the interviews with relevant documents and literature (Benner, 2003). This process ensures that the data obtained is accurate and reliable. By using this approach, it is hoped that this study can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how theological education can integrate pastoral counseling to improve the competence of church counselors.

RESULTS

This research reveals that the integration of pastoral counseling in theological education is still a major challenge in many theological education institutions. Many theological colleges focus more on teaching doctrine and systematic theology, while pastoral counseling is often considered as an additional element that is not very important. Interviews with 12 (twelve) theology lecturers showed that although there is awareness about the importance of pastoral counseling, the application of this material in the curriculum is still limited. Most theological education curricula are inadequate to equip students with practical skills in counseling, resulting in their lack of preparedness in dealing with the emotional needs of the congregation. This is also reinforced by the

findings from previous research which showed that many church leaders feel unprepared to provide effective counseling to their congregations (Collins, 2007).

One of the main results of this study is that there is a big gap between theory and practice in theological education concerning pastoral counseling. Most lecturers admitted that although pastoral counseling is taught in some seminars and trainings, the teaching emphasizes theory rather than practical application in the field. Trained pastoral counselors need more hands-on experience in the church context, such as practicing empathetic listening and providing practical guidance based on principles of psychology and theology. The results of this study suggest that theological education needs to include more practical components in pastoral counseling training, such as counseling simulations and hands-on mentoring (Robinson, 2014). According to Powlison (2007) and Vanhoozer (2005), there needs to be an increase in curriculum development that incorporates pastoral counseling theory and practice in a balanced manner.

The study also revealed that most of the church leaders who were already running counseling ministries felt that they needed further training in combining psychological principles with theological approaches in counseling. Many of them rely on personal approaches based on experience or guidance from their mentors without formal training in pastoral counseling. According to Benner (2003) and Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett (2001), this indicates that although churches need trained counselors, formal training in pastoral counseling is still very limited, and it affects the quality of support provided to congregants. In this regard, theological education should provide more in-depth training to prepare future church counselors with more comprehensive skills in managing congregants' emotional and spiritual problems (Tournier, 2006; Wicks, 2000). These results suggest that changes in the theological education curriculum are necessary to address these needs.

In addition to the challenges that exist in teaching counseling theory, the results of this study also show that many churches have not fully realized the importance of pastoral counseling as part of a comprehensive church ministry. According to Crabb (2001) and Jones (2014), in some cases, churches focus more attention on Bible teaching and worship activities, while counseling considered as a secondary element that does not get serious attention. Nonetheless, this study found that churches with leaders trained in pastoral counseling showed more positive outcomes in supporting congregants experiencing emotional crises, such as depression or anxiety. This suggests that pastoral counseling

conducted by trained church leaders can greatly contribute to the emotional health of congregants (Van der Kolk, 2014). Therefore, churches need to increase their understanding and acceptance of pastoral counseling as an integral part of their ministry.

This study also found that the integration of psychology in pastoral counseling has a positive impact on church counselors in dealing with congregants' emotional problems more holistically (Clinebell, 1984). An approach that combines psychology-based counseling with theological principles can help church counselors to understand more deeply the psychological condition of the congregation without neglecting spiritual values (McMinn, 2011). For example, in dealing with trauma issues, an approach based on trauma psychology theory, as proposed by Van der Kolk (2014), is helpful in understanding how trauma can affect the spiritual life of the congregation. In this case, pastoral counselors need to be trained to recognize trauma symptoms and provide appropriate interventions, both psychologically and spiritually (Benner, 2003). The results of this study confirm that integrating these two disciplines in theological education is beneficial to equip future church counselors with a wider range of skills.

DISCUSSION

Churches need to develop approaches that are more sensitive to the social and cultural context of the congregation in pastoral counseling (Wilson, 2011). As the social and cultural backgrounds of church members become increasingly diverse, it is important for pastoral counselors to understand the social dynamics that influence the problems faced by congregants, such as family problems, domestic violence, or addiction (Tournier, 2006). Powlison (2007) revealed that in providing counseling, it is important to take into account external factors that affect the emotional state of individuals. Therefore, theological education should provide more training on culturally sensitive counseling skills, so that church counselors can provide more relevant and effective support (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001). Teaching counselors to understand and appreciate cultural differences can assist them in providing guidance that is more appropriate to the congregation's situation.

The importance of pastoral counseling in supporting the process of spiritual recovery for congregants facing life difficulties (Crabb, 2001). Pastoral counseling is not only concerned with providing emotional support but also with guiding congregants to rediscover their purpose in life within the Christian faith. Nouwen (1996) emphasizes

that the role of pastoral counselors is to bring congregants back to God as the true source of restoration. Therefore, theological education needs to emphasize the importance of integration between spiritual and psychological dimensions in pastoral counseling, so that church counselors can be more effective in providing in-depth guidance (Palmer, 1998). The results of this study reveal that an approach that combines both is essential in helping congregants achieve holistic recovery.

Pastoral counseling in the context of trauma and life crises that occur in modern society (Van der Kolk, 2014). Many congregants are traumatized by violence, accidents, or natural disasters, and this often affects their spiritual life (Benner, 2003). Pastoral counselors trained in the psychology of trauma can provide more appropriate interventions, helping congregants to process their trauma while maintaining their relationship with God (Tournier, 2006). Teaching about trauma in theological education is therefore crucial, so that future church counselors can provide appropriate guidance to congregants in crisis. This also underscores the importance of including psychological knowledge in the theological education curriculum to enhance the competence of church counselors (Shaw, 2005).

Churches that have integrated pastoral counseling in their ministries show a positive impact on the spiritual and emotional well-being of congregants (McMinn, 2011). Pastoral counseling based on psychological and theological understanding can help congregants to cope with their life problems more effectively, so that they can serve God better. These results support the argument that churches should be more serious in integrating pastoral counseling training in theological education to equip church leaders with the required skills (Jones, 2014). Thus, the church can be a more effective place to assist congregants in dealing with their emotional and spiritual challenges (Wicks, 2000). The integration of pastoral counseling in theological education can enrich the quality of church services and help church counselors to provide more holistic support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and discussion of this study, first, it is strongly recommended that theological education should prioritize the integration of pastoral counseling in their curriculum. Although some theological colleges have started to include lessons on pastoral counseling, many still focus on theory and doctrine without providing sufficient practical training (Shaw, 2005). As a recommendation, theological education needs to add

more practice-based training in pastoral counseling, such as counseling simulation sessions and practicum supervision (Robinson, 2014). This is important so that students not only understand the theory, but can also apply their skills in real situations faced by the congregation (McMinn, 2011). Thus, they will be better prepared in carrying out pastoral duties that require practical counseling skills (Clinebell, 1984).

Second, strengthening the theological education curriculum by incorporating psychological principles relevant to pastoral counseling. For example, teaching the basics of developmental psychology, trauma psychology, and evidence-based counseling techniques can enhance church counselors' understanding of congregants' emotional states (Van der Kolk, 2014). The application of psychological theories in pastoral counseling enables church leaders to provide support that is more thorough and sensitive to the emotional needs of congregants (Powlison, 2007). By integrating these two disciplines, aspiring church counselors can blend expertise in spiritual guidance with effective psychological skills (Benner, 2003). This will create church counselors who are more holistic in addressing congregational concerns (Tournier, 2006).

Third, churches need to understand that pastoral counseling is an integral element of the overall church ministry. Many churches still view counseling as an add-on, not as a core part of their ministry (Crabb, 2001). Therefore, churches should strengthen policies to include pastoral counseling as an integral part of every ministry, including spiritual and emotional accompaniment for congregants in crisis (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001). Church leaders who are trained in pastoral counseling will be better able to deal effectively with congregants' emotional problems, which in turn can improve their spiritual and social well-being (Jones, 2014). Thus, it is important for churches to take pastoral counseling more seriously in their ministries.

Fourth, there is a need for more ongoing training for church leaders already in ministry. Given that many church leaders claim to be underprepared to provide adequate counseling, ongoing training is needed (McMinn, 2011). Churches can work with theological education institutions to provide more structured and practical needs-based pastoral counseling training programs (Shaw, 2005). This training can cover psychological as well as theological aspects, so that church leaders can provide guidance that is appropriate to the increasingly diverse emotional situations of the congregation (Van der Kolk, 2014). With ongoing training, church counselors will continue to develop in providing more effective services to the congregation (Robinson, 2014).

Fifth, theological education also needs to pay attention to the importance of cultural awareness in pastoral counseling. As a church that serves congregants from various social and cultural backgrounds, it is important for church counselors to have a deep understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that influence the problems congregants face (Powlison, 2007). According to Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett (2001), churches that have leaders with high cultural awareness can provide more relevant and contextualized guidance. Therefore, theological education should include training on cultural diversity and social sensitivity in their curriculum (Tournier, 2006). Thus, pastoral counselors will be better able to deal with the challenges faced by congregants from diverse backgrounds, and the church can be more effective in providing needed support.

Sixth, this study suggests that churches need to cooperate with theological education institutions in designing a more innovative curriculum for pastoral counseling. This cooperation is important to ensure that pastoral counseling training is not only relevant to the needs of the church, but also takes into account the latest developments in psychology and social science (Wilson, 2011). By combining theory and practice, churches can equip church leaders with more comprehensive skills to deal with congregational life issues (Clinebell, 1984). This will result in church counselors who not only master biblical teachings, but also have practical skills in providing holistic and comprehensive guidance (Benner, 2003). Thus, the church can be better prepared to meet future pastoral challenges, and the congregation will benefit more from pastoral counseling services.

CONCLUSIONS

This study affirms the importance of integrating pastoral counseling in theological education to build more holistic and effective church counselor competencies. Although some theological education institutions have started to introduce pastoral counseling in their curriculum, there is still a gap in the application of practical skills required in church ministry. Therefore, theological education needs to adopt a more integrated approach between counseling theory, psychology, and theological principles to prepare church leaders who are competent in dealing with the emotional and spiritual challenges of the congregation. This will ensure that church leaders can provide appropriate guidance to congregants' needs in various aspects of their lives, both spiritual and psychological. The

development of a more comprehensive and practice-based curriculum is necessary to achieve this goal.

In addition, churches should further recognize pastoral counseling as an integral part of their ministry, not just an added element. Continuous training for church leaders and the integration of pastoral counseling that is sensitive to the social and cultural context of the congregation are essential to increase the effectiveness of the ministry. By paying attention to these various aspects, churches can be better equipped to provide more holistic support for congregants. Through stronger integration efforts between theology and psychology in theological education, it is expected that the church will have counselors who are more competent and ready to face the challenges of the times. Thus, the results of this study can serve as a basis for the development of theological education policies that are more responsive to future pastoral needs.

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