

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research based on the research questions and hypotheses. The discussion relates the present results with the past research findings. This chapter also deliberates on the research implications towards the theoretical, methodological, and practical practice in the counselling field.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The discussion on the findings begins with the discussion on the participants' demography follows by the qualitative findings and ends with the quantitative.

5.2.1 Demography of Participants

The participants for the study consisted of 43 graduate students from the Guidance and Counselling program, Faculty of Educational Studies, UPM. Their average was 27.8 years old, meaning that most of the participants were young graduates. The majority of them were females. Similar to other helping services like social work and nursing, females made up the majority population compared to males. Counselling profession is

not an exception. Females are reckoned suitable for the helping profession because of their personal characteristics. Female helpers are considered more warmth, patience, gentle, caring, and easy to empathize compare to males (Nystul, 2011).

Having more females than males as research subjects are similar to that found in other research. Smaby, et al., (1999), Rybak and Brown, (1997), and Romano and Sullivan (2000), Sapora Sipon (2008), and Mohammad Nasir Bistaman and Rohany Nasir (2009) have more female participants than males. This scenario reflects the popularity of the profession among females than males.

5.2.2 Discussion for Research Objective No.1: Experience with conflict in group counselling

Definition of Conflict in Group Counselling

To understand their experience with conflict in group counselling, the counsellor trainees were asked to define the term “conflict”. The trainees showed consensus in their definition of “conflict.” To them, conflict in group counselling was about the disagreement or discrepancy in ideas, values, and experiences between individuals. This definition parallel to Brown’s (2009), Kottler’s (2001), Lulofs and Cahn’s (2000) and Whitaker’s (2001), who associate conflict to human interaction. Conflict is shown through overt expression of verbal and nonverbal communication among the parties involved.

On the other hand, this definition lacks any direct mention about goals being obstructed or personal needs being frustrated (Folger, et al., 2009; Kellerman, 1998). The trainees

focused the description of conflict on the vicarious expression without associating them to the internal motivation or to the frustration of personal needs. But, it can be implied that disagreement between members was about personal differences in views between themselves and the world.

Discrepancy in ideas, values, and experiences was inevitable in the group as individuals from different backgrounds gathered to work on achieving their personal goals. When disagreement happened, members felt their needs were being frustrated or challenged because these disagreements prevented them from concentrating on their goals.

Furthermore, the trainees' definition of conflict in group counselling was exclusive to defining interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict is often overtly expressed through actions or emotional expressions. Because of its high occurrence, writings on group counselling also tend to give priority to interpersonal conflict as compared to other types of conflict (Brown, 2009; Kormanski, 1982; Kottler, 2001). On the other hand, Kellermann (1995), Whitaker (2001), and Yalom and Leszcz (2005) argue that conflicts in group counselling exist not only at the interpersonal but also at the personal and group-as-a-whole levels. By assuming that conflicts in group counselling were interpersonally oriented, counsellor trainees were made oblivious in understanding the complexity of conflicts in the group.

Needlessly, there were trainees who observed intrapersonal and group-level conflicts. Unfortunately, the observations were not noticed by majority of the trainees. Taken into consideration all the different observations, the present study defined conflict in group counselling as being "the disagreement or discrepancy in ideas, values, or experience that

could happen at the intrapersonal, interpersonal or group level. It is displayed through verbal and nonverbal expression, and involved needs being denied, challenged, or frustrated.”

Triggering Factors

As the trainees shared their definitions of conflict, they also discussed the factors causing the frictions. Among the factors were the counterproductive behaviours, personality differences, negative emotions, communication styles, discussion of sensitive issues, and an incompetent leader. These factors provoked conflict instead of elevating it. Similar observations have also been acknowledged by Corey (2011), Corey et al. (2010), Brown (2006), Ida Hartina (2003), Ivey, et al (2001), and Rybak and Brown (1997) in their groups. These factors are not exclusive to the group members only, as Brown (2009), Corey, et al. (2010) and Trotzer (2006) claim they could be exhibited by the leader as well. Brown (2006) discovers that counterproductive behaviours, in particular antisocial behaviours, provoke negative reactions in the group. In term of communication styles, the finding is in agreement with Cloven and Roloff (1995), Rollof and Miller (2006), Rybak and Brown (1997). At the onset of conflict, members and leaders are more likely to interact in a non-friendly and threatening pattern. Accusation and use of strong words are sometimes uttered without restrain.

As for the expression of negative emotions like anger, frustration, and sadness, Brown (2009), Yalom and Leszcz (2005) find these emotions to be threatening to other members, causing them to retreat into themselves. Similar observation by Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Roloff and Miller (2006) of the interpersonal conflicts show that

emotions and conflict are highly connected. Individuals involved in interpersonal conflicts express more negative emotions and behaviours compared to those not involved in conflict.

Furthermore, the present study discovers that discussion of sensitive issues was also accepted as one of the triggering factors of conflict. From the literature, sensitive issues, which could be disguised in many forms, have not been clearly defined. But, Malaysia is unique in term of its buildup where many religious, political, and cultural issues that when shared among the different races can easily provoke racial sentiment (Singh, 2001). Thus, members inviting a debate on sensitive issues are often labeled as intentionally wanting to start a discord among the members. In other words, the more heterogeneous the group is, the higher is the likelihood of members exhibiting their differences in many issues discussed in the group.

Finally, having a leader who lacks skills and knowledge to lead a group is often a challenge to the group. This is in agreement with the many writings on group counselling. Abdul Halim Othman, et al. (2000), Stockton, et al. (2004), Trotzer (2006), Ward (2005; 2006), and many others have mentioned that having a good intention leader leading a group is not enough to ensure that group counselling would be conducted effectively. A leader should possess group skills, right attitudes, and knowledge of group theories and personality development, and have undergone relevant training before he or she should be allowed to lead a group.

As a whole, the onset of conflict in group counselling could be the result of some triggering factors. These factors could come from the members, the leader, and the social environment where the group is conducted.

Conflict Development

In terms of their experience with conflicts in group counselling, the trainees witnessed progressive development of conflict. The trainees recalled observing disrespectful and defensive behaviours being targeted towards themselves and other members. These behaviours included rejecting helps from others, becoming argumentative, showing offensive facial expressions, behaving rudely, and making degrading comments. The trainees' descriptions of the offensive behaviours were similar to the pattern of problem behaviours described by Brown (2009), Corey (2011), Gladding (2013), Tuckman (1970), and Yalom (1985) for the transitional stage of group development. During this stage, groups are generally characterized by attacking behaviours among members, anxiety, defensiveness, resistance, and struggle for control (Brown, 2009; Corey, 2011). According to Yalom and Leszcz (2005), members behave defensively because they want to test the leader and the members' acceptance or rejection of them, to experiment with power, and to learn to express themselves. Quite often these defensive behaviours are portrayed in interpersonal conflicts between individuals who feel their positions or status are being challenged (Folger, et al., 2009; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Within the Asian culture, this situation is more likely to happen between members who are different in status either in the work ranks or in social positions (Suppiah, 2006).

In addition, the trainees also mentioned the occurrence of bullying acts during conflict. Bullying relates to the use of vicious words like calling a group member “stupid,” or involves demeaning and intimidating acts with the intention to humiliate and undermine the self-confidence and self-esteem of the other (Soules, 2002). In the present study, this action came from a few members against another group member. This bully behaviour, if not controlled could cause the victim to retreat into himself and refuse to further participate in the group activity. Brown (2009) and Ivey, et al. (2001) observe similar behaviour patterns in their groups. This bullying act is also quite rampant in couple and other interpersonal relationship conflicts (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Roloff & Miller, 2006). When members start to engage in this act, they are showing disrespect to others, and at the same time are challenging the leader who has failed to create a therapeutic group environment (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

From their experience with conflicts, it was noticed that different trainees revealed different sections of the conflict episode. Some noticed the overt disrespectful and defensive behaviours, some on the members’ refusal to open up, and some when the group was stuck. To summarize their experience, the present finding concluded that at one end there were trainees who were quite sensitive to the members’ slight behaviour change. And, at the other end, there were trainees who were only aware of the conflict when more negative than productive behaviours were being displayed by the members. These differences in observation could be linked to the level of knowledge and training the trainees received (Rybak & Brown, 1997; Stockton, et al., 2004; Trotzer, 2006).

In addition, Gladding (2012), Yalom and Leszcz (2005) claim conflict is also part of a group process where its occurrence is anticipated to happen throughout the group development. Conflict during the later stages is more inclined towards issues like termination, loss, and expectations (Brown, 2009) but these changes in themes were not mentioned by any of the trainees. Maybe the themes did arise but since they were more subtle and not accompanied by counterproductive behaviours, they were dismissed as normal instead of being dealt seriously by the group.

As a conclusion, the findings from the first research question show that the trainees' definition of conflict shares some similarities with other definitions of conflict. Yet, the present definition is devoid of internal influences and it is not being directly associated with goals being frustrated. In term of the triggering factors, most of them are supported by previous research. Discussion of sensitive issue seems to be more relevant to the multiracial context of Malaysia. Finally, in term of their observations of conflicts, some trainees were more sensitive to the behavioural and emotional clues while some only noticed the conflict when the situation turned serious. As a whole, the trainees descriptions of and experiences with conflict were limited by their familiarity with interpersonal conflict compared to other types of conflict. These limitations may result from trainees' inadequate exposure to intrapersonal conflicts specifically and to group experience in general.

5.2.3 Discussion for Research Objective No. 2: Conflict management strategies to manage conflict in group counselling

Conflict Management Strategies

From the discussions with the counsellor trainees on their conflict management strategies, the present research discovered the trainees' tendency to apply certain conflict style, group skills, and personal creativity as their conflict strategies.

Conflict Styles

In exploring their conflict management strategies, the trainees discussed about their conflict styles. The avoiding and the third party were the approaches identified among the trainees. According to Thomas and Kilmann (1974), leaders who avoid conflict show low level of concern for their own and other peoples' interest. They avoid from dealing with the conflict for fear they will lose. Folger, et al. (2009) notice that avoiding can be disguised through several actions. Counsellors may avoid working with conflicts to protect members from experiencing more hurt, to downplay individual differences, to focus on the common ground, or to replace the challenging issue with a less threatening one (Ida Hartina, 2003; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). According to Folger, et al. (2009) and Brown (2009), avoiding can be a useful approach when the relationship between members is still in its early stage and they are not yet ready to face the conflict.

The use of the third party approach is paralleled to Ting-Toomey, et al. (2001) study on the influence of cultures on conflict styles. The use of third party, according to Ting-Toomey (1988) and Ting-Toomey, et al. (2001), is quite a common practice in the

collectivist or pluralist society where parties involved in the conflict may express their grievances through a neutral party instead of directly confronting the other. The present study showed that the trainees resorted to a go-in-between to help alleviate the effects of the conflict. This go-in-between was chosen from among the group members and he or she acted as a mediator between the parties in conflict. In the Asian culture, this approach is applied when the leader is one of the parties involved in the conflict, or the leader fears that he or she may act with bias towards one of the parties, or the group decides it wants a neutral party to help them (Ting-Toomey, et al., 2001).

Given their young age, the trainees were still lacking in group experience. Like other new counsellor trainees they wanted to be accepted and liked by the group. Fear of losing one's face might prevent them from taking constructive action to manage the friction between group members. Asian culture strongly believes in saving one's face, meaning it is considered rude to be direct in one's opinion about the other's misdemeanor. This kind of behaviour, Glen (1981) and Ting-Toomey, et al. (2001) say reflects the associative culture. The Asian prefers not to hurt others' feelings by ignoring to acknowledge something inappropriate has occurred. Thus, they prefer to be indirect in their communication with others. In this case, the trainees resorted to the avoiding style and the third party because they were unsure of the consequences of their actions on the group dynamics or on a particular member. Other conflict styles might be explored as trainees became better acquainted with the group or when they were more comfortable with their roles in the group. As Abdul Harris Mohd. Darudin and Norwati Mansor (2011) find that the administrative personnel dealing with recurrence conflicts often use

compromising. So, it is hope that as the group progresses, the trainees are ready to experiment with different conflict styles to manage conflicts in the group.

Group Skills

In term of group skills, the trainees tended to apply the attending skills like questioning, clarifying, paraphrasing, and summarizing. These applications of basic counselling skills are found in the training of group counsellors (Smaby, et al., 1999; Toth, 1996; Urbani, et al., 2002). But, relying on the attending skills, according to Brown (2009) and Trotzer (2006) are inadequate to help the trainees deal with conflict or challenging group events. The use of attending skills may not successfully illuminate the threat of conflict as experienced by the group. This claim is supported by Brown (2006), Ivey, et al. (2001), and Kottler (2001), who encourage their groups to utilize paraphrasing, reflecting, empathic listening, and reframing when working with conflicts. To deal with conflict effectively, the trainees need to apply some advanced group skills like facilitating, confronting, blocking, and mediating in order for the conflict to be dealt holistically, both in exploring the depth and breadth of the issue (Ivey, et al., 2001; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Comparing among the group skills mentioned by the trainees, facilitating skill is the most popular. Facilitating skill, according to Gladding (2012), opens up interaction flows among group members. Using the skill, counsellors leave the responsibility of solving the conflict in the hands of group members. But, total reliance on this skill may create undue pressure and frustration in the group and may even lead to disenchantment with the group process as a whole (Trotzer, 2006).

Furthermore, in a conflict situation, the mediating skill is seen as more effective. Even though the trainees do not directly mention the skill, it will be the skill to look into. Gerzon (2006) and Trotzer (2006) believe that if counsellors can mediate the situation, they can help members transform personal differences and obstacles towards strengthening the group dynamics. Mediator leads through conflict meaning that the leader reaches out to the members, seeking to bridge differences that exist among them. By mediating, the counsellor faces differences honestly and creatively, acknowledges the complexity and sensitivity of the situation, and works together with the members to yield the group from the conflict (Gerzon, 2006).

Another counselling skill that is also popular among the trainees is confronting. Confronting is usually used to identify or explore discrepancies, to promote sharing on the affective and intellectual levels, or to stop something (Gladding, 2012). The trainees used confronting to explore the discrepancies between group members' words and actions so that better understanding of the situation could be achieved. Yet, the skill was also used to attack members who showed counterproductive behaviour or on members who started the discord. Confrontation, when used too early in the group development may create feeling of discomfort (Corey, et al., 2010), thus should be avoided until trust and bond have been established in the group.

Personal Creativity

From the interview, only two trainees claimed they used creative approaches to deal with conflicts. Interestingly, these creative approaches did not utilize verbal communication skill as its mean but rather focused on the expressive or artistic medium. To the trainees,

drawing and writing down how members felt about the conflict might help them express themselves in a safe and non-threatening way. Even though this approach is seen as avoiding by Brown (2009) and Folger, et al. (2009), Ting-Toomey, et al. (2001) accept it as a portrayal of the pluralist society. In the pluralist society, people are afraid to confront conflict in the open as it may cause a person to lose face, so indirect approach to address the issue is encouraged.

Based on the findings to the second research question, several conclusions could be derived. First, most of the sharing on conflict management strategies revolved around the trainees' experiences dealing with interpersonal conflict. But, conflicts in the group could also occur at the intrapersonal and group levels. Brown (2009), Kellermann (1998), and Whitaker (2001) want group counsellors to be aware of the different types of conflict existing in group counselling. Group-level intervention skills call for a high degree of knowledge and understanding on the part of the trainees. Group-level conflict intervention skills refer to the ability to act in support and encouragement of the entire group, not just for individual members, or subgroups within the group (Trotzer, 2006). Intervening at the group level shows to the group that there are unacknowledged similarities among group members that would be helpful to be verbalized and explored. Ability to manage conflict at the group level is beneficial to show members what is being avoided, minimized, discounted, or ignored could actually be very important for further growth and development of the group and the individuals (Brown, 2009; Kellermann, 1998; Whitaker, 2001).

Second, the trainees were more inclined to use their power to manage conflicts especially to control and set directions for the group process. They used the power to (i) stop the session when discussion of the event seemed fruitless, (ii) change the topic when conflict turned complicated, (iii) introduce activity when group members seemed to lose interest, and (iv) remind members to focus on their objectives for joining the group. Lieberman, et al. (1973) and Yalom (1985) caution group leaders to use their power sparingly. Group counsellors who rely on their authority power to manage the group may actually retard the group growth instead of promoting it (Lieberman, et al., 1973).

Third, if the trainees can acknowledge the different types of conflict and are comfortable exploring them, then it is accommodating for them to play a different role and apply other group skills relevant to the demand of the situation. The trainees might want to share their observations of the group dynamics or the meaning the conflict brought into the group process. They could do that by giving feedbacks to group members about their verbal and nonverbal behaviours. By doing that the trainees might increase the group motivation for change, gain greater insight into how one's behaviour affects others, and increase their comfort with taking interpersonal risks (Moran, et al., 2002).

Fourthly, the finding showed that the trainees had a tendency to work on the expression of disagreement in ideas or thoughts among members. In doing that, they were likely to neglect or de-emphasize certain emotions displayed by members. To them, negative emotions like anger should be downplayed if not it may retard the group growth. But, the nature of conflict is it is always accompanied by emotions, particularly by anger and anxiety (Folger, et al., 2001; Roloff & Miller, 2006). Due to that, Brown (2009) suggests

group counsellors to listen and understand the intensity of feelings each member in the group wants to express. This exploration of feelings include those who are directly involved in the conflict and those who are not actively involved at the time. Avoiding conflict and its accompanied emotions should be the last resort used as it will create more problems to the group as it develops.

5.2.4 Discussion for Research Objective No. 3: Attitude towards conflict in group counselling

From the data analysis, it was shown that the trainees portrayed negative attitude towards conflict in group counselling. Attitude involves the interplay of affective, behavioural, and cognitive responses. Attitude can exist entirely of cognitive or of affective component and it is not necessary for all three elements to be presented at one time (Bohner & Wanke, 2002). Due to that, the trainees' attitude towards conflict in group counselling could be inferred from their emotions or thinking pattern or actions. The trainees reported experiencing more negative feelings like anger, anxiety, and sadness, and they, at the same time, felt some uncomfortable physiological responses. In term of cognitive, they developed conflict scripts which described the self-defeating thoughts they have about themselves and the group. As a result, they engaged in behaviours that show more denials towards working to manage the conflict.

Affective Component

Almost all counsellor trainees experienced myriad of negative feelings when they encountered conflicts in group counselling. These feelings, according to Guerrero and

LaValley (2006), and Long and Brecke (2003) are expected during conflict. These emotions occur in reaction to stimuli, internal and external, that threaten one's self-image or goals (Long & Brecke, 2003). The negative feelings are reactions to seeing members disagree with each other, raise their voice, or criticize one another. This finding supports Bolger, et al. (1989) who find arguments accounted for 80 percent of the variance in respondents' negative mood. As the trainees observed more disagreements, arguments, and disruptive behaviours in the group, the more uncomfortable they became the more negative their feelings would be.

Along with the negative affects are physiological changes, particularly in terms of how activated or aroused the trainees were during conflicts. Their voices become strained, heartbeat becomes faster, and body tense up. These reactions are common responses to stress, regardless of its sources (Girdano, Dusek, & Everly, 2005). The physiological reactions like increased heartbeat and tensed muscle, according to Folger, et al. (2009) and Guerrero and LaValley (2006), are usually associated with anger. Given the physiological reactions reported by the trainees, they were actually feeling angry having to deal with conflicts in the group. The trainees expected the group to run smoothly where members would tolerate differences in ideas and personality. Thus, seeing the group not functioning as expected the trainees feel challenged and angry having to put in more efforts to bring harmony to the group.

Conflict Scripts

During conflicts, the trainees showed a tendency to engage in self-defeating thinking patterns that mostly worked to undermine their confidence as counsellors. They

associated conflict to resistant, weakness, and failure. They developed negative conflict scripts of the situation and expected the worse to happen to them and to the group. These cognitive scripts are usually based on past experiences with conflict as well as present concerns and interests (Roloff & Miller, 2006). They learn the scripts from observing unresolved family conflict or from one's interpersonal relationships with others (Folger, et al., 2009).

The conflict scripts in this study were confined to the way the trainees expected the conflict to unfold in the group. One example of the trainees' conflict scripts began with "differences in ideas or opinions follows with disagreement and argument among members. Then, negative emotions like anger and anxiety will permeate the group environment. As a consequence, members will engage in counterproductive behaviours that will disrupt the group process. The members start to distrust each other and to lose confidence in the leader. As a result, they will stop coming to the group. And, the trainee fails as a leader." The worse touch to the script was when the trainees believed members would abandon the group and view the trainees as failure. The way the script is being structured and repeated in the trainees' mind is highly related to their expectations towards the group functions, the members, and themselves as counsellors (Roloff & Miller, 2006; Whitaker, 2001). Due to the negative conflict scripts, the trainees became mentally stuck, paralyzed in their own negative beliefs, and lost focus on how to constructively respond to the situation.

Conflict scripts are also related to the perception of one's competency as group counsellors. Majority of the trainees lacked group experience. They assumed that after

completing the group counselling course they would be able to effectively conduct group counselling Trotzer (2006). Like Brown (2009) says, these faulty beliefs cause many young graduate to overestimate their skills and knowledge in conducting effective group counselling. The trainees had built perceptions that a group would be without conflict if it was well planned, members were satisfied, or when everybody was allowed to share. So, they were not prepared when conflicts happened. Automatically, they felt defeated and confused. These faulty beliefs about group development and one's efforts caused them to develop negative attitude towards group counselling in general and to conflicts in particular.

Behaviour Component

In term of behavioural reactions towards conflict, majority of the trainees exhibited acts that were resistant to the situation. They wanted to stop further discussion on the conflict, ignore it, become quiet, or turn aggressive. These behaviours, except for being aggressive, paralleled the actions described by Kormanski (1982) of group counsellors who when under pressure would try to find immediate relief by refusing to work immediately on the conflict.

The behaviours reported by the trainees were also supported by Brown (2009) who observed that some group counsellors when confronted with conflict incline to exhibit any of the following actions: (i) wait to work or become involved in the group, (ii) suppress important feelings, (iii) expect others to take care of them, (iv) make quick evaluation and judgments about others, and (v) expect others to fully understand them. By choosing to engage in the above behaviours, the trainees expected the group to feel

sympathy for their lack of constructive action to manage the situation. Due to that, they might change from being someone who was sympathetic towards group members to being someone who needed support and care.

As for the aggressive acts by the trainees, Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Roloff and Miller (2006) find them to be associated with the trainees' interpretation of the situation. If the trainees perceived the conflict to be purposively planned to impair the group process, then their intervention would be more aggressive. In other words, the trainees' evaluation of the conflict and the behaviours accompanied it would influence their move whether to target the whole group or to focus on one individual member. If this is done, then it runs in contrast with the suggestion by Brown (2009), Ida Hartina (2003), and Ivey, et al. (2001) that during conflict every member should be given the opportunity to share their feelings and ideas about the event.

Furthermore, there were some trainees who would try to analyze the conflict in efforts to find appropriate solution. Conflict poses a major challenge to any group works (Kottler, 2001; Stockton, et al., 2004) as it requires the leader to process the many parts of the event. A leader needs to be able to register and understand the group dynamics, members' interaction patterns, and emotions shared and disguised (Stockton, et al., 2004). A new trainee caught in the middle of a conflict would usually find it overwhelming to process the situation systematically. But, knowing that there is a trainee who is ready to engage in the action is a comfort. Shechtman (2007) and Stockton (2010) believe that conflict should be dealt rationally and without prejudice. The trainee engaged in the analyzing

process should not limit his observation on members' behaviours only but should also extend his observation to himself as well.

As a whole, the present findings on the trainees' behavioural reactions show that they were inclined to refuse dealing with conflicts. They preferred to stop the discussion on conflict and ignore it. Some remained passive and some acted aggressive. But, some did try to analyze the situation. All these behaviours reflected the trainees' mental state and their emotion at the time. One's behaviour usually reflects one's pattern of thinking and feelings. To understand their behaviours, it is important for the trainees to be aware of their conflict scripts as well as their feelings.

To conclude the findings to the third research question, several conclusions can be made. First, it can be concluded that conflicts cause majority of the trainees to develop more negative than positive attitude towards conflict in group counselling. Besides the negative feelings, they also engaged in self-criticism and self-defeating thoughts, and behaved counterproductively. But, for those trainees who possess positive attitude towards conflict, they are able to use conflict to promote new learning for themselves and the group. They start to acquire interest in managing conflicts, and at the same time, learn to take responsibility for the situation.

Second, the trainees' attitude towards conflict could be understood through their descriptions of conflicts. Augoustinos, et al. (2006) claim that whether an event is experienced as positive or negative can be inferred from one's choice of words. Examining the words used by the trainees, they seemed to agree with the findings of Hocker and Wilmot (1985). The respondents in Hocker and Wilmot's (1985) study when

asked to respond to the word “conflict” gave the following responses: hostility, anger, disagreement, competition, tension, anxiety, threat, pain, and hopelessness. In the present study, the trainees described conflict using words like “anger,” “anxiety,” “sadness,” “failure,” “stuck,” “disagreement,” “argument,” “incompetent,” and “attack.” The list showed that the trainees used more negative words to describe conflict. To them, conflicts challenged their perfectionist view of a perfect group and themselves as effective leaders.

Third, there are a few trainees who develop positive attitude towards conflict in group counselling. To them, conflict is by itself a rewarding experience. They view conflicts as important to their professional growth as counsellors. As for group members, conflicts can motivate them to use their resources creatively. Corey, et al. (2011) and Yalom (1985) similarly notice these beliefs among their group leaders. Conflicts motivate and promote creativity within the group by encouraging members to view conflicts from various angles. Conflicts also teach members to evaluate the consequences of their decisions and be more responsible with their actions. The trainees’ awareness of the importance of conflict in promoting maturity and progress make them more proactive in dealing with conflicts (Corey, et al., 2011). Without conflicts, a group may actually lack progress (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Members may be denied the chance to take risk or be aware of their attitude towards many incidents occurring in the group.

Lastly, those with positive attitude towards conflict accepted that it made them aware of their incompetency and lack of knowledge in handling the situation. This self-awareness, instead of de-motivating them, forces the trainees to seek out advices and suggestions

from other more experienced counsellors. This spirit is highly supported by Ching Mey See and Kok-Mun Ng (2010) and Trotzer, (2006) who urge counsellor trainees as well as registered counsellors to continue seeking further training and supervision to sharpen their skills in becoming effective and competent counsellors. Conflict should be seen as a catalyst for the trainees to improve on their professionalism as group counsellors.

5.2.5 Discussion for Research Objective No. 4: Perceptions of group leadership functions during conflict in group counselling

For this research question, the counsellor trainees shared their perception of group leadership, leadership roles, and leadership functions in general and specifically during the conflict in group counselling.

Group Leadership

Leadership in group counselling is not an easy concept to define (Gladding, 2012). It involves the combination of counsellors' personal qualities, theoretical foundations, and personal style (Trotzer, 2006). The counsellor trainees viewed group leadership as having a leader who was able to perform leadership skills, was knowledgeable, and had positive attitude towards others.

The trainees associated group leadership skills to the ability of leaders to recruit new members, lead, facilitate positive changes in members' life, and show care and concern for members' welfare. These descriptions of leadership skills parallel to the skills described by Corey, et al. (2011), Gladding (2012), and Jacobs, et al. (2012). Leadership skills are necessary to help the trainees manage the interaction and the group dynamics.

These skills ensure communication flow, make members feel part of the group, and allow them to focus on their goals (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

In addition, leadership is also about making decision and utilizing individual unique characteristics for the benefits of the group. This is in agreement with the observation made by Andrews (1995) and Olson (2008) in the groups. Most often as leaders, the trainees would be making decision involving the group structure, group membership and group norms (Corey, et al, 2011; Olson, 2008). In term of guiding the members to look beyond their personal differences, Hansley (2002) and Perrone and Sedlacek (2000) agree that it is one of the important leadership responsibilities. The trainees should know how to integrate these individual differences appropriately into the group dynamics. The trainees knew that as group leaders they should provide members with personal space to work out their differences and to find a common ground among them. This responsibility, according to Brown (2009) and Whitaker (2001) is both challenging and yet satisfying if it could be achieved within the group. Once members are able to respect each other's uniqueness, discussion and sharing will take place smoothly.

Another facet of leadership is the power of the leader. The counsellor trainees were aware of the authority power entrusted on them. They could impose the power by directing members to follow certain rules or they could share or regulate the power with group members. Some trainees believed the power was to be shared with the group once members were ready. This perception is akin to Andrews (1995) and Brown (2009) who claim that as members show progress and exhibit more responsible behaviours, they could be trusted with some authority to decide on the group interaction. Similar use of

power is also supported by Beekun and Badawi (1999) and Nayal Rashed (2007). They believe members should be given some power in the decision making involving the group. Leaders should encourage discussion where members are given equal chance to express their ideas and feelings openly. But, some trainees were against the idea of sharing the power with the members. To them, leadership was a responsibility entrusted to only qualified personnel. Leader was obliged to fulfill the responsibility from the start of the group to its end. This view is supported by Jacobs, et al. (2012), Kraus, et al. (2001), and Morran et al. (2004). Depending on the situation, leaders should never leave the duty of leading the group on members. The members, as the receiving party of the counselling help, are under the leaders' full responsibility.

Moreover, this conflicting view of the leaders' power is not new to group practitioners. And, to see that the trainees are also struggling with the issue show that they are beginning to grasp the complexity of being a leader in the group counselling. Like one of the trainees claimed, leadership in group counselling is not similar to the public concept of leadership. In group counselling, leaders need to use their power to promote sharing, good values, and working alliance among the members.

Furthermore, leadership is also about personal characteristics. According to the trainees, group counsellors should be knowledgeable, nonjudgmental, possess positive energy, and have positive attitude towards others. This characteristics share similarities of an effective group leader described by Brown (2006), Corey, et al. (2010), Gladding (2003; 2012), Jacobs, et al. (2012), Kottler (2001), and Nystul (2011). Even though the lists describing the leaders were actually longer than the characteristics given by the trainees, the latter

descriptions captured the essence of an effective leader. As beginners, the trainees believed that having possessed certain characteristics of an effective leader, they also were able to conduct a productive group.

Another interesting finding from the interview is the fact that even though half of the trainees are Malays whose religion is Islam, none has mentioned the Islamic attributes associated with leadership in Islam. Beekun and Badawi (1999), Hassan Al-Banna (1979), Nayal Rashed (2007), and Zafar Bangash (2000) all mention that to be a trustworthy and effective leader, the person should possess *tuqwa* and *amanah* attributes. This failure in acknowledging the contribution of the Islamic attributes could be due to the nature of the counselling curriculum that separate between religion and Western theories of counselling. The present research believes that the trainees will show higher level of accountability towards guiding the group members to make positive changes in life if they can integrate the Islamic leadership attributes into the concept of group leadership.

Leadership Roles

In term of the leadership roles, the trainees explored the several leadership roles they were familiar with. The roles included as a leader, a catalyst, a facilitator, and as one of the members. These perceptions of roles are in agreement with Corey's (2011), De-Lucia's (1999, 2001), and Trotzer's (2006) descriptions of group counsellors' roles as a director, a facilitator, a participator, an observer, and an expert. Even though the trainees did not assume themselves as experts, they believed that an effective group leader should be knowledgeable in term of group counselling theories, group stages, and personality

development. Trotzer (2006) defines an expert as having the knowledge, information, and wisdom that can be utilized to help members or improve the group process. This definition of an expert is similar to the word *taqwa* as described by Nayal Rashed (2007). He sees a leader with *taqwa* as having the fear of accountability, is knowledgeable, and has wisdom. Given the definition, it seemed that the trainees only focused on the technical knowledge of running a group. The trainees were still far away from able to call themselves as experts for they still lacked the wisdom and higher sense of accountability towards themselves as the leaders and towards members who were under their responsibility. Regardless of that, the trainees showed a positive attitude to continue seeking new knowledge and this has been one of professionalism qualities stressed by Abdul Halim Othman, et al. (2000), Ward (2006a; 2005), and others. To become effective helping service providers, the trainees should attend workshops, seminars, and have regular discussions with more experienced individuals on a regular basis.

In term of being a catalyst, the trainees associated the role to them being an agent of change in members' life. This role is mentioned by many group researchers including Cormier and Hackney (2008), Corey (2011), Jacobs, et al. (2012), Yalom (1985), and Yalom and Leszcz (2005). As a catalyst, the trainees functioned like an enzyme to stimulate, encourage, and support any progress made by members. They were persistent and yet exhibited care towards members.

Another role that is also significant is being the facilitator of the group. This role carries different meanings depending on the context. Rogers (1961) uses it to refer to his group leaders. From the person-centered group, facilitators should fulfill five distinct functions:

(1) conveying warmth and empathy, (2) attending to others, (3) understanding meaning and content, (4) conveying acceptance, and (5) linking (Posthuma, 2002). But, the role can also be considered as one of the many roles required of a group counselor. According to Gladding (2012) and Trotzer (2006), a facilitator is responsible in directing and engaging group members in effective communication. Facilitator makes efforts to draw group members together, help them talk about themselves, and share their concerns (Trotzer, 2006). Based on the present research finding, the trainees seemed to have mix perceptions of the facilitator role. Among the perceptions included seeing the facilitator as synonym to being a leader, or a mediator, or a catalyst, or an observer to group process. These many views of the facilitator roles have some relation to the history of group development in Malaysia. In a personal discussion with Associate Professor Dr. Wan Abdul Kader at the Department of Public Service on August 7, 2012 he explained about the misconception of the term. According to him, during its early years, group works were highly popular as the medium of change utilized by the National Civic Bureau or popularly known as Biro Tata Negara (BTN) to disseminate information and promote nation building among the public servants and the university students. Counsellors' help were sought of but their roles were not to conduct group counselling but rather to facilitate activities and discussion among the participants. In the 1980s and 1990s, BTN organized hundreds of group activities with the help of counsellors. And, throughout the programs counsellors were referred to as the facilitator by the secretariat and the participants. Consequently, the term permeated beyond the BTN programs and whoever led group work was identified as facilitator. Another influence to the use of the term, according to Wan Kader, has to do with the popularity of the person-centered

approach. Rogers used of the facilitator term seems to blend well with the Malaysian culture. “Facilitator,” as contrast to “leader,” carries softer meaning and implies indirect approach to influence people. The term conveys a message that the person lacks authority power to force others to engage in activities they do not want to. Given the two scenarios, the facilitator role in its totality can represent the leader’s role or it can be exclusive to facilitating effective communication in the group.

The final role mentioned by the counsellor trainees is leaders as the participator in the group. Dinkmeyer and Muro (1971) point out that an effective group counsellor is one who is viewed by group members as being with them, and for them, as individual. Through leaders’ participation, members come to see them as real human beings who share similar life issues with the group (Gladding, 2012). Nevertheless, this role is quite controversial. Its acceptance is based on the theoretical background of the trainees (Gladding, 2012). In the person-centered approach, the participatory role seems to align with perceptions of leaders’ status in relation to other group members (Corey, 2008; Gladding, 2012). On the other hand, psychoanalysts would refrain from actively involved in the group process as their way of encouraging transference and resistance to emerge naturally in the group (Whittaker, 2003; Yalom, 1985). Regardless of the trainees’ theoretical beliefs Ivey, et al. (2001) and Troitzer (2006) agree that they should not use the group time for personal interest or to dominate the session with their issues.

Leadership Functions

In term of group leadership functions performed during conflict, the trainees described their tendency to give meanings to events happening in the group, facilitate expression of

feelings and ideas, establish some order in the group, and promote supportive atmosphere in the group. These functions are equal to leadership functions described by Lieberman et al. (1973) and Anderson (1985), and partially with Mackenzie et al. (1987) and Yalom (1985). The trainees assumed all the four leadership functions described by Lieberman et al. (1973) in dealing with conflict in group counselling. They allowed members to express their feelings and thoughts, provided information based on their observation and interpretation of the conflict, showed caring, and prohibited counterproductive behaviour from disrupting the group process. When necessary, the trainees would restructure the running of the group. This proactive action is supported by Whittaker (2001) who believes leaders should adapt the group structure to meet the different needs of group members and to the different stages of group development.

One of the leadership functions is about the execution of the leadership power. The trainees used their executive power to contain the expression of negative emotions from threatening the group dynamics and to divert the group from being too engross with the conflict. They asked the group to go for a short break or engage in activity like drawing or coloring. This kind of power application is discouraged by Brown (2009) and Ivey et al. (2001) who claim that conflict should be dealt directly and emotions need to be expressed if not they may retard group growth.

The application of one's power during conflict is also determined by the stages of group development. The conflict scenarios the trainees described reflect the second stage or the transitional stage of group development. Thus, the trainees used their authority to stop discussion on the conflict in order to bring stability to the group and to reserve some time

for the friction to cool off before working through it. If this is the intention of the trainees, then it is in agreement with the suggestion made by Kottler (2001), Lulofs and Cahn (2000), and Donahue and Kolt (1992). Not all conflicts should be dealt with immediately because by allowing some time for the conflict to unravel, the leader may empower members to work through their differences together without any interference from the counsellor.

Based on the findings to the fourth research question, three conclusions are offered. First, the trainees' perception of group leadership is still loosely defined. Even though the definition is tied to the trainees' ability to perform the leadership skills, personality characteristics, and attitude, it does not capture the whole essence of group leadership in group counselling. The perception lacks the theoretical influence on the leadership concept. This is understandable given the fact that the trainees are still novice to group counselling. They are more concern with acquiring knowledge and skills and place less emphasis on their personal development as future counsellors. To them, being knowledgeable in group development and able to perform group skills are enough for them to conduct group counselling. However, as one knows, the leader's personality is also important for it usually becomes the medium between knowledge and skills. Counselling service is best delivered when the trainee as a person can integrate his/ her personality characteristics to the leadership concept, group knowledge and skills. By applying the Gestalt concept of wholeness where the whole is more important than its parts, may help enhance the trainees' understanding of leadership in group counselling.

Second, in term of their understanding of the various group leadership roles, the trainees show a balance view of their roles. They can play the roles of a group leader, a catalyst, a facilitator, and a participator. This flexibility in adapting to the different roles shows that the trainees are open to new experiences and challenges await them in group counselling.

Lastly, the trainees show that they are able to perform all the leadership functions described by Lieberman, et al. (1973). But, from the sharing, it seems that some trainees resorted to a particular function during conflicts. They relied on the executive function to stabilize the group and as a mean to control the group dynamics. But, often use of the authority power may actually stuck the group development (Trotzer, 2006; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). And, as Ting-Toomey, et al. (2001) say these trainees may also develop constraint in their choice of conflict management strategies. Furthermore, in term of providing support, the trainees tend to give more cognitive rather than affective support. During conflict, both kinds of support are necessary but emotional support shows better acceptance among members (Brown, 2009; Ivey, et al., 2001). The trainees who concentrate only on the cognitive feedbacks may convey a wrong message that expressions of negative emotions are not welcome in the group. To avoid unnecessary psychological harms to the group, the trainees need to explore all the leadership functions and to understand their effects on the group development.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the qualitative findings. The next section of this chapter discusses the quantitative findings of the study. Four hypotheses have been tested and rejected. The discussion would try to illuminate the reasons behind the hypothesis rejection.

5.2.6 Discussion for Research Hypothesis No. 1: There is no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest scores on counsellor trainees' knowledge on conflict after they have completed the training module.

The conflict management training module focuses on the knowledge of conflict, leadership functions, and conflict management strategies. The pre-test and post-test scores showed a significant increment in the trainees' knowledge and skills components of the module. The module had successfully helped the trainees to strengthen their knowledge on conflict, leadership functions, and application of conflict management strategies.

Prior to attending the workshop, the trainees' scores showed low to moderate understanding of their leadership functions and conflicts, and also low to moderate level of ability to apply conflict management strategies. Trotzer (2006) claims the inadequacy of knowledge and group skills as experienced by the trainees is the result of counselling graduate programs decision to offer only one course on group counselling. Hansley (2002) suggests a group counselling course be taught in two semesters to give students the opportunities to understand and explore the different aspects of group counselling.

The CMTM followed the three stages of skill acquisition: understanding, exploring, and acquisition by Smaby, et al. (1999) and Urbani, et al. (2002). The trainees were guided to understand and explore their beliefs about group counselling, group leadership, conflicts, and conflict management. Then, they engaged in several role-play activities to manage conflict in group counselling. This flow of knowledge and skills, according to Furr and

Barret (2000), allow the trainees to enhance their understanding as well as to improve on their conflict management strategies.

Another factor that could possibly contribute to the improvement lied in the delivery methods of the module. According to Sidek Mohd Noah and Jamaludin Ahmad (2005), and Rashid (2005), a module is made effective when it can incorporate multiple delivery methods like small group discussion, feedback exchange, role-play, and mini lectures. These various approaches allowed the trainees to experiment with the material through verbal and nonverbal engagement. They could express their understandings through words and enhance their skills through role-play and observations.

Finally, the last contributing factor could be the self-exploratory nature of the module. This approach was chosen because it simulated similar approach widely used in the teaching of counselling courses. Initially, the trainees were introduced to the topics of interest, followed by self-exploratory activities to delve into their perceptions and beliefs towards the topics. And, finally, to experience and acquire better ways of handling the different conflict types. This experiential approach is supported by Daniels and Larson (2001), Furr and Barret (2000), Gromley (2008), Guth and McDonnell (2004), Hansley (2002), Romano and Sullivan (2000), Smaby, et al. (1999), Toth (1996), and Urbani, et al (2002).

From the result, it showed that the trainees were more confident in handling the intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts compared to the group level conflict. This claim was supported by the qualitative findings where the participants could easily identify the intrapersonal and the interpersonal conflicts. Refer to Appendix E. The counsellor

trainees might have experienced both conflicts in their personal and professional life. And, they might have seen clients struggling with the intrapersonal conflict of being stuck in their own beliefs, or observed closed relatives engaged in relationship conflict.

Unfortunately, the trainees still found the group level conflict more difficult to identify. This claim is parallel to Gladding (2012) and Whitaker (2001) who find that to be aware of the conflict, the trainees have to see the group as an entity by itself with its own personality. It means they need to view the group as whole or as a system, where members are connected to each other through certain overt and discreet norms. In other words, the trainees have to develop sensitivity towards the group environment created by the system. Only through this awareness the trainees can understand when the group is being trapped by a conflict.

To conclude, the present finding shows that the module is needed to enhance the trainees' management of the group level conflict. This could be done by allocating more time for the role-play activity. Readings on the group system approach may also be helpful to enhance understanding of group functioning and conflicts.

5.2.7 Discussion for Research Hypothesis No. 2: There is no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest scores on counsellor trainees' conflict management strategies after they have completed the training module.

Overall, the trainees showed very strong improvement in their ability to perform the conflict management strategies after attending the training workshop. Major improvements were in the areas of ability to respond and manage conflict. They believed

they were becoming better at handling and differentiating conflict types, focusing on conflict, responding to feelings, giving feedbacks constructively, and generating new perspective.

The improvement made in the conflict management strategies by the trainees may be due to delivery methods used, in particular the role-play activity. Role-play allowed the trainees to (i) observe how skills are applied within conflict situations, (ii) practice the skills among themselves under the guidance of a facilitator, and (iii) receive constructive feedbacks on how to improve their skills. Role-play has been accepted as a powerful teaching tool to help counselling students acquire new skills (Anderson & Robertson, 1985; Daniels & Larson, 2001; Jacobs, et al., 2012).

In addition to the trainees' reporting improvement in their conflict management strategies, significant improvement was also seen for items which focused on the trainees ability to choose the right words to respond to group members, show respectful behaviour, listen to ideas, demonstrate understanding of differing perspectives, and use humor. It seemed that the workshop had indirectly exposed the trainees to new ways of behaving and responding during conflict, acquired new words, and cognitively learned to process conflict situations systematically.

One of the challenges involved in leading group counselling is the cognitive capability of counsellors to process events happening in the group. Brown (2006) and Stockton, et al. (2004) mention the importance of counsellors to possess strong cognitive ability when handling groups. Counsellors need to process and provide meaning to their experience, and at the same time develop a mental framework to analyze the significant events in the

group (Wiggins & Carroll, 1993). The role-play and simulated conflict events introduced in the module allowed the trainees to practice and develop a new mental framework of the different types of conflict. This framework guided them in structuring and executing the appropriate responds to manage the conflict constructively.

Even though the module was developed to teach conflict management strategies, it has indirectly enhanced the trainees' interpersonal skills. The trainees became more sensitive with their words and behaviours during conflicts. This indirect learning opportunity made them conscious of the language barrier and their limited exposure and experience in the area of human psychology. These two components to conflict management have been stressed by Brown (2009). According to Jacobs, et al. (2012), to effectively manage the conflict, the trainees had to be careful with their intervention skills, intonations, and language. All these should be congruent with each other to avoid further misunderstanding among the parties involved in the conflict.

To conclude, the finding showed that conflict management involved the utilization of behaviour, cognitive, and affective sensitivity on the part of the counsellor trainees. Their strategies should be synchronized with their emotions and cognitive processing of the event. In other words, to improve on their conflict management strategies, the trainees must also show improvement in their cognitive processing, words acquisition, and emotional stability.

5.2.8 Discussion for Research Hypothesis No. 3: There is no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest scores on counsellor trainees' attitude towards conflict in group counselling after they have completed the training module.

The pretest and posttest scores showed a significant increase in the positive attitude towards conflicts in group counselling. However, looking at the individual items on the questionnaire showed mixed results. Items that contributed to the positive attitude towards conflict came from the cognitive and the behavioural components. The trainees acknowledged that conflicts had positive value that could promote their personal growth. They strongly agreed that conflicts made them more creative, motivated, and tolerant of individual differences. These acceptance of the positive sides of conflict are akin to Brown (2009), Corey (2010), Kottler (2001), and Yalom and Leszcz (2005) who regard conflicts as having the potential to stimulate counsellor's growth and creativity.

The trainees also showed inclination towards solving conflicts instead of avoiding them. This change in attitude and behaviour could be credited to the trainees' having better understanding of conflicts, leadership functions, and the different conflict strategies. As mention by Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) attitudes get strengthen as one gains knowledge and skills to execute his or her functions. Believing that one understands the conflict scenario, and at the same time is equipped with the appropriate strategies will promote the trainees' self-confident and attitude to handle the situation constructively.

Some of the items on the questionnaire showed no significant increase between the pretest and posttest scores. Most of the items came from the affective component. The items focused on some of the possible emotions the trainees might feel during conflicts.

The feelings identified include being angry, scared, happy, sad, worried, and disappointment with the possible conflict scenarios in the group. The items, which showed no significant difference include statements like “angry when members try to impose their ideas on other” (item 13), “scared when members raised their voice” (item 14), “happy when members show respect to ideas different from his/her” (item 15), “feel sad when conflict causes members to be unfriendly to each other” (item 16), “get worried when I cannot help to solve conflict” (item 18), and “feel disappointed when conflict causes group to be silent” (item 19). From the responses, it could be concluded that (i) not every trainee reacts with the same feelings to the same situations, (ii) some trainees may not have encountered similar situations, thus they don't know how their feelings would be, and (iii) more than one feelings might be associated with the events. It could be concluded that the feelings chose for the situations failed to capture the trainees real emotions.

Every conflict is unique and it simulates different emotions in people. The same conflicts, according to Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Folger, et al. (2009) may trigger different emotions in different individuals. Counsellor trainees A, who observes group members' raising their voice may feel threatened by their behaviour. On the other hand, trainee B may feel sad being caught in a similar situation while trainee C may get angry. Since the researcher only associated one feeling with one incident, it might prevent trainees having different feelings to strongly agree with the items.

For item 18 “get worried when I cannot help to solve conflict,” the small change in the scores could be attributed to the thinking that solving conflict was not the primary

responsibility of counselors. Whether the conflict got solved or not, the trainees felt they need not worry because the whole group should take the responsibility to solve their own differences. The trainees assumed that with time group members would be able to deal with it. This is one of the faulty beliefs about conflict as identified by Brown (2006; 2009). Some conflicts need to be dealt with immediately and directly, while some may wait until the right time. But, the management of conflict is the responsibility of counsellors. If conflicts are continuously denied and avoided, group may experience more difficulty later or it can be arrested in its development (Corey, 2010; Yalom, 1985).

For item 19 “feel disappointed when conflict causes group to be silent,” the trainees were not disappointed by the silence in the group during a conflict. Silence, during the group initial stage was not unusual but it could create ambiguous responses. Since silence moments were expected, the trainees were not surprised or disturbed by them. To the trainees, silence brought some relief to them. According to Cormier and Hackney (2008) and Jacobs, et al. (2012), silence is positive when it gives time for group members and counselors to reflect on the event, to find the right words to respond, and to get in touch with one’s emotions and thoughts. Yet, silence can have negative effects if it is used as escapism to avoid dealing with the conflict (Cormier & Hackney, 2008; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Treating conflict with silence is therapeutic to a certain extent but if silence is to proceed without anybody acknowledging its impact on the group dynamics then the group may get stuck in its development (Corey, et al., 2011; Yalom, 1985). The trainees needed to experience some level of worry and should react with caution when a group fell into silence. So, for item 19, silence saved the trainees from acting to the situation. Instead of feeling disappointed, they were actually relieved by it.

The module had significantly showed an effect on the trainees' attitude towards conflict in group counselling. Positive changes came from the behaviour and cognitive components, meaning that the module had made the trainees more receptive towards conflicts and improve their confidence to face challenges brought by conflicts. Nevertheless, in term of emotions, the trainees needed to develop internal awareness to explore the connection between conflicts and their emotions. Since the trainees' feelings towards conflict might have its roots in their past relationship with significant others (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000), their feelings towards conflict in the group counselling might be entangled with those past memories. Some negative feelings like anger, anxiety, sadness, disappointment, and guilt associated with past conflicts could have been repressed. Allowing them to surface during the group session might create unsettling emotions in the trainees. Therefore, they were more likely to engage in destructive behaviours. Thus, stronger positive attitude towards conflict in group counselling could be seen once the trainees can find congruency between their cognition, behaviour, and emotions.

5.2.9 Discussion for Research Hypothesis No. 4: There is no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest scores on counsellor trainees' attitude towards group leadership functions after they have completed the training module.

The trainees reported experiencing significant improvement in their attitude towards group leadership functions. Yet, the detail scores for the Attitude towards Group Leadership Functions show mixed results. Significant changes occurred in the three leadership functions: emotional stimulation, caring, and meaning attribution. The three functions required the trainees to respond to expression of positive and negative feelings,

help group members to look into their problem behaviour, guide in the problem solving, protect members from psychological pressure, meet their psychological needs, and interpret their behaviour within the group context. The findings are in agreement with Anderson (1985), Yalom (1985) and Lieberman, et al. (1973) who believe counsellors should show support, concern, empathy, and help the group interpret the event and the behaviour that lead to conflicts. Lieberman, et al. (1973) observe that a successful group is developed when group leaders show high levels of caring and meaning attribution, combined with moderate levels of emotional stimulation and execution function. Gladding (2012) and Kottler (2001) also make the same claim that counsellors should portray more caring and warmth to the group rather than using power to show their authority. Counsellors who cling strongly to executive function are more likely to lead a stressful group (Yalom, 1985).

The three leadership functions, emotional stimulation, caring, and meaning attribution, are often emphasized in the counsellor training. These functions reflect the trainees' attitude towards counsellors roles and towards counselling relationship. The trainees did not perceive the functions to be incongruent from the roles they were already familiar with.

Furthermore, the trainees did not show a significant increase in scores for the executive function. Item 21 "educate members on their roles" did not show significant change after the training because the trainees were already aware of their roles in informing and guiding group members to perform their responsibilities. This task was usually done during the group initial stage as part of the structuring process. For item 24 "let group

behave as they wish,” the trainees could be influenced by their theoretical orientation and training. How members behave should reflect on the objectives of the group, the group composition, and the trainees’ theoretical framework (Gladding, 2012, Corey, et al., 2011, Brown, 2009). Nystul (2011) claims that trainees who are interpersonally oriented will show high agreement with it compared to behaviourally oriented trainees. The response to the item showed that the trainees as a group believed members should be given the rights to behave as they like.

As for item 25 “offer advice when asked,” its response reflected the trainees’ guiding behaviour. Behaviourally inclined trainees might not hesitate to provide advice as it could enhance facilitation of new behaviours (Corey, 2011; Jacobs, et al., 2012). In contrast, other trainees might refrain and let the members decide on the appropriate action to take. Offering advice to members has triggered mixed responses from group practitioners. Some believe that advice, given in a suggestion form is acceptable as it may stimulate members to think beyond their own perspectives (Brown, 2009). However, others like Yalom (1985) and Posthuma (2002) suggest that members should find their own solution to the problem without interference from the leader. This view is in contrast with the leader’s role described by Corey (2010) and Corey, et al. (2011) who believe leaders should help members find solution to their problem or offer help in their decision making. From their responses to the item, the trainees preferred to refrain from giving advice for they believed that it was the members’ responsibility to work on their issues.

As for item 26 “willingness to share leadership roles,” trainees were unsure whether they should share their leadership roles with group members as the group progressed. The

hesitation, according to Ivey, et al. (2001) may come from their indecision on determining which roles to share with the group and which should remain as their sole responsibility until the group terminates. The struggle between safeguarding the leadership roles and empowering the group with some leadership responsibilities will continue to be a major concern to the trainees in their pursuit to become professional helpers.

One item from the caring function did not show significant change in scores. Item 13 stated that “find it difficult to empathize with the group members’ issues.” Empathy is a counselling skill as well as an attitude (Nystul, 2011; Cormier & Hackney, 2008). As a skill, empathy can be taught whereby trainees learn to appropriately convey their empathic understanding through selective choice of words. Nevertheless, as an attitude, empathy is considered an important part of a counsellor’s personal development which needs to be cultivated and internalized (Brown, 2009; Ivey, et al., 2001). To be internalized, empathy requires emotional and cognitive stimulations before it can be transformed into action (Akos, 2000). As it is true with other attitudes, empathy for others can be genuinely experienced if one has gone through an almost similar experience before. This perspective is in agreement with Cormier and Hackney (2008) who claim that counsellors do not possess feelings of empathy for every client’s issues. For some issues, counsellors may find it easier to feel empathy but in other situations, they may need to force themselves to develop empathy towards the clients (Nystul, 2011). It seems that the module succeeded in teaching empathy as a skill by encouraging the trainees to find the right words to convey their empathy, but the module was not enough to bring empathy to the attitude level. Hopefully, as they gained more experience and developed

as a person and a professional, the trainees may go beyond seeing empathy as a skill, instead learn to make it part of their attitudes.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the trainees were comfortable with their attitude towards the emotional stimulation, caring, and meaning attribution functions. These three functions were congruent with their perceptions of counsellors roles. The challenging function remains to be the executive power. Yalom (1985) agrees that too much power being exerted on the group may paralyze the group progress and create animosity among group members. The lack of leadership experience on the trainees' part may cause them to misperceive the term "power" and "control". Due to that misunderstanding, they hesitated to take a stand on their responsibilities towards critical events happening in the group. Another perspective is, how one executes the leadership power is highly influenced by one's theoretical orientation (Gladding, 2012; Corey, et al., 2011). Interpersonally oriented counsellors believe that leadership power should be shared with group members. This belief is in contrast with theories that adhere to the authority power of a leader like behaviour and cognitive related theories.

This section discusses the qualitative and the quantitative findings of the study. The qualitative findings focus on the experience of counsellor trainees with conflict in group counselling, conflict management strategies, attitude towards conflict, and perceptions of leadership functions during conflict. The quantitative findings have shown that the CMTM has significantly showed effects on the trainees' pretest and posttest scores. The trainees gain more knowledge on conflicts and leadership functions, more able to apply

various conflict management strategies, and become positive in their attitude towards conflict and towards group leadership functions.

5.3 Research Implications

The research has successfully achieved its objectives and answered the research questions and hypotheses. The research findings show that the counsellor trainees could benefit from knowledge on conflict, practice with different leadership functions and conflict management strategies. The development of the Conflict Management Training Module for Counsellors could improve the knowledge, the acquisition and application of skills, and the attitude of counsellor trainees towards conflict and towards group leadership functions. This part focuses on the implications of the research which are divided into theoretical, methodological, and practical.

5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

The research has explored three theories to understand the experiences of counsellor trainees with conflict and group leadership functions. The theories are the Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 2001), theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2010), and the face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988). These theories are used to explain the different parts of the research findings. Based on the findings, four theoretical implications are being proposed.

First, the trainees' ability to managing conflicts demonstrate their beliefs in their knowledge and skills regarding the situation. As they are being exposed to more information on conflict and leadership functions, and experiment with different conflict

strategies, their beliefs in handling conflicts increases. This trust in one's ability, according to Bandura (1986), helps the trainees to persevere during difficult situation. Thus, by letting the trainees experience first hand conflict management and receive corrective feedbacks of their skills, they get to enhance their performance accomplishment. Consequently, this will strengthen their efforts to deal with conflicts directly.

Second, the study finds that counsellor trainees have developed some negative images of conflicts and themselves as leaders of group counseling. These negative pictures are being translated into cognitive scripts which describe the destructive consequences of conflict to the group and to their professional image. These scripts are parallel to the findings of Roloff and Miller (2006), Lulofs and Cahn (2000), and Hoeker and Wilmot (1998). These conflict scripts reflect the trainees' past conflict experience with significant others and whether the conflict has been resolved successfully or not. The negative conflict scripts stimulate physiological responses like increased heart beats and tense muscles, and also induce unpleasant emotions in the trainees. Bandura (1986) believes these adverse responses to conflict may hinder constructive intervention from the trainees. This explains why some trainees become mentally stuck and choose to ignore or withdraw from dealing with conflicts immediately.

Based on the analysis of the conflict scripts, the study finds that the trainees view conflict in group counselling from the "either or" thinking style. "If conflict happens it means I'm weak or incompetent or fail as a leader." "If conflict happens it means either the group is making a progress or it is stuck." Having this dichotomous thinking style made the

trainees view conflicts and themselves from the either positive or negative perspective without having the possibility that something positive may result from a negative situation. Given that, their thinking about conflict is negatively skewed. This thinking style will produce anxiety and other negative feelings in the trainees. To counter these negative conflict scripts, the trainees need to develop a more balance thinking towards conflict. Instead of looking at conflict as either good or bad, they need to believe that a third possibility exists. Conflict can be neutral and how it is handled determines its consequences. Instead of having one positive option associated with conflict, the trainees should develop more positive views of conflict. Having more positive perceptions of conflict may neutralize the negative view of conflict. In addition, it will encourage the trainees to view the situation and themselves with less criticism.

Third, to explain the trainees' attitude towards conflict and towards group leadership functions, the research adopts the theory of reasoned action (TRA). This theory focuses on the trainees need to believe that they have perceived behaviour control in term of skills and knowledge to manage conflicts. And, that the constructive management of conflicts by them is condoned by other counsellors, group members, and the counselling profession. Based on the present research, the findings support the assumptions of the TRA. Once the counsellor trainees believe in the dynamics of their group leadership roles and that they are competent in executing the group skills and conflict management strategies, their intention to manage the challenging situation increases. This is reflected in their more favorable attitude towards conflict and group leadership functions.

Fourth, the present research incorporates the face-negotiation theory to understand the counsellor trainees' conflict management strategies. This study finds more similarity between the trainees used of conflict management strategies proposed by Ting-Toomey, et al. (2001) than by other conflict researchers. Ting-Toomey has added three more conflict strategies after taking into account the cultural influence on the various conflict styles. The present research finds that counsellor trainees tend to employ the indirect approach to conflict, meaning that they are inclined to adopt the avoiding and the third party approaches. It shows that the trainees are more concerned with protecting others' face. Yet, the application of the conflict styles may also indicate the possibility that they lack experience in managing challenging situations. In other words, they are unsure of the consequences of their actions, particularly on how the actions may affect their image as leaders, relationship with group members, and group development.

In addition, the counsellor trainees also show that they used activity and personality assessment as means to reduce the impact of conflicts on the group. The present study sees these indirect approach to conflicts as the trainees attempt to channel the conflict through a safe mode. These actions can be seen as the third party approach because the trainees are using other mean to buffer the effects of conflicts. However, by doing that, they are running away from taking the responsibility for the situation, and leaving the management of the conflict at the mercy of an activity.

In conclusion, the present study has made some theoretical implications through the research findings. The trainees need to develop beliefs in themselves that they can handle conflicts constructively. This can be achieved through further acquisition of

knowledge and intervention skills relevant to the situation. In term of conflicts scripts, the study observes that having a neutral perspective of conflict may lessen the “either or” thinking the trainees already developed towards the negative consequences of conflicts. The findings suggest that the use of activity and other indirect means could be seen as part of the third party approach. The activity reduces the trainees’ responsibility for managing conflicts and it also buffers the negative effects of conflict on the group. Finally, the study finds the possible influence of culture on the conflict styles. Yet, this influence is uncertain because the trainees might have chosen them for various reasons, including to disguise their incompetency.

5.3.2 Methodological Implications

In term of the methodological implications, the present study has made three contributions. One is in term of research design, second is introducing a training module for group counsellors, and third is in the development of assessment tools to complement the module.

First, in its attempt to explore the counsellor trainees’ experience with conflict, group leadership functions, and conflict management, the research uses a combination of the qualitative and the quantitative methods. At present, there are several research on group counselling which incorporates the two approaches. This research hopes its sequential exploratory research design which utilized the phenomenological approach and the one-group pretest-posttest experimental design may further guide future researchers interested in similar design. The research design allows the findings from one research to be tested for its effects and usefulness through another method. Having two different design

methods and two methods of data collections to explore and determine the complexity of a phenomenon will allow for in-depth understanding of the topic under study.

Second, based on the interview data, a training module called a Conflict Management Training Module has been developed. The module serves as an intervention tool for counsellor trainees interested to improve their conflict management strategies. The module can also function as an advanced training tool for counsellors to enhance their knowledge on group leadership functions and acquisition of group skills. Looking through all the six sessions of the module reveals that besides helping trainees acquire the knowledge of conflict and leadership functions, they help trainees explore their attitudes towards conflict and group leadership functions. The module fulfills the lack of available advanced training of group intervention skills, particularly in guiding counsellor trainees to manage challenging situations in groups.

The module is organized to be quite practical and time efficient. The module combines three components necessary to make training a success. It focuses on giving and sharing of knowledge, self-exploration sessions where one process ones' thoughts and values, and skills training through modeling and role-play. This combination allows smooth transfer of knowledge and acquisition of skills, which then lead to the development of more favorable attitude towards conflict and group leadership. In term of time, it requires only 12 hours to complete the module. It can be conducted as a two-day workshop or can be organized on a weekly basis with one session per week for six weeks. Also, the module can be used as a complementary teaching aid to counsellor educators and group practitioners who are involved in the training of group specialists.

Lastly, the research has developed four sets of questionnaire to assess the effects of the Conflict Management Training Module. The Knowledge on Conflict measures the trainees' knowledge on conflict, leadership functions, and ability to manage conflicts in group counselling. The Conflict Management Strategies questionnaire assesses the trainees' ability to perform the different strategies in managing conflicts. The strategies are specific to conflict management and reflect the trainees' perceptions of their ability to execute the strategies competently. To capture the trainees' attitude, two attitude questionnaires have been constructed. The first is the Attitude towards Conflict that allows counsellor trainees to explore their attitude towards conflict from the behavioural, cognitive, and affective perspectives. The second is the Attitude towards Leadership Functions, which explore the emotional stimulation, meaning attribution, caring, and executive functions. Overall, the attitude questionnaires assess the trainees' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours towards group counselling, group members, and themselves as counsellors. Taken together, counsellor educators may apply the questionnaires to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and attitude of their counsellor trainees to determine who need further assistance and who are ready and able to manage conflicts in group counselling.

In short, the study has successfully explored the challenging experience of managing conflicts in group counselling from the perspective of counsellor trainees. The counsellor trainees, the counsellor educators, and the Board of Counsellors may use the Conflict Management Training Module and the questionnaires in the training of group counsellors. The module and the questionnaires can serve as teachings aids to enhance the trainees' acquisition of knowledge, as well as the conflict strategies. These two tools

can enhance advanced group skills training, and also consolidate the competency of group counsellors in Malaysia.

5.3.3 Practical Implications

The discussion on the practical implication of the study focuses on its implication towards counselling students, counsellor educators, and the Board of Counsellors.

5.3.3.1 Implications for Counselling Students

According to several scholars in group counselling like De-Lucia, Gladding, Kottler, Trotzer, Ward, Whitaker, and Yalom, just to name a few, counsellors who work with groups should be well trained in term of group knowledge as well as group skills. These group skills should comprise of counselling skills and leadership skills. Compared to counsellor education in the USA, which offers counselling program at the graduate levels, Malaysia offers similar programs at the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels. In other words, counsellors in Malaysia could be as young as 24 years old when they join the helping services upon their graduation. Once they become the service providers, they are expected to deliver like any other counselors graduated from the same programs (Abdul Halim Othman, et al., 2000; Stockton, 2010; Trotzer, 2006). They are supposed to be knowledgeable and competent at performing their roles as group counsellors.

Given the one group course offered by the counselling programs, most counsellor trainees have some trouble in grasping the magnitude of information taught within the group counselling syllabus. Due to its heavy content requirement, the trainees are not fully aware of their inner biases and faulty beliefs regarding group counselling and

counselors leadership functions. Sometimes the trainees are at lost as to how to best apply their group knowledge and skills within the group context (Trotzer, 2006). This concern is shared by Brown (2009; 2006), Kraus, et al. (2001), and Trotzer (2006) who strongly believe that before the trainees immerse themselves in the role of group counsellors, they should deal with their perceptual biases towards challenging events in the group, leadership functions, and group counselling. Some trainees graduate from the counselling program without having a proper guidance on how to manage conflict constructively. Conflict is important to group development. It sometimes works like a double-edge sword. It can promote group growth or if poorly managed can make the group stuck. For these trainees who feel they lack the competency to lead group in general, and manage conflict in particular, they may benefit from the module. This training module provides the opportunity for them to embark on self-exploratory journey while at the same time acquire the knowledge and strategies to constructively manage conflict in group counselling.

5.3.3.2 Implications for Counsellor Educators

Producing competent group counsellors is the concern of any counselling program. For that matter, counsellor educators may want to look into some existing training modules that can be incorporated into the teaching of group course. The findings of the present study show that the Conflict Management Training Module (CMTM) can bring positive effects to the counsellor trainees' knowledge, skills and attitude towards conflict and towards the group leadership functions. The CMTM can be offered as a complete two-day training workshop or its components can be taught separately to meet the needs of

the counselling students. The module delivery modes employed the frequently applied teaching methods used in the counselling courses; hence, they can easily be practiced within the classroom setting. The mini lectures disseminate knowledge while role-play and modeling guide in the acquisition of skills, and self-reflection and small group activities explore attitudes. Putting all the delivery modes together, they help trainees explore conflict and attitudes from various perspectives. Given the module and the guide from counsellor educators, trainees can enhance their learning. As a result, they will experience an improvement in skills competency and be more confident to lead group counselling.

5.3.3.3 Implications for Board of Counsellors

The Board of Counsellors in Malaysia was established in 1998. Among the responsibilities of the Board is to ensure the counselling services provided to the public meet some satisfactory standard. To do that, the Board needs to oversee the counselling curriculums offered by the various universities so that competent counsellors can be trained to meet the society demands. Society needs competent counsellors who possess the knowledge of human psychology and counselling theories, are skillful at applying counselling skills, and possess the right attitude.

To keep the counsellors and counsellor trainees in Malaysia abreast with counselling professionalism, the Board organizes seminars and conferences at the national and international levels so that new knowledge in counselling can be disseminated and shared among the interested parties. Since counselling depends highly on counsellors' knowledge, skills, and professional development in helping others, the needs for practical

training and supervision beyond the formal education are always in demand. The Board, as suggested by Abdul Halim Othman, et al., (2000), Ching Mey See and Kok-Mun Ng (2010), and Sarojin Menon (2000), should be more rigorous in their approach in upgrading the counsellors competency. As they are exposed to new knowledge and advanced skills training, the trainees in particular and the counsellors in general can learn new ways of behaving and thinking to better serve their clients.

The Board of Counsellors should be the responsible party to keep continuous assessment of the counsellor trainees produced from the many counselling programs in Malaysia. The CMTM and its accompanied assessment tools can be used to evaluate the counsellors' and the trainees' ability to manage conflicts and attitude towards conflict and towards group leadership functions. They should be encouraged to continually upgrade their knowledge and skills beyond their graduation years (Trotzer, 2006).

Furthermore, the Board should take the initiative to encourage group practitioner to develop training modules focusing on various group skills acquisition. These modules if proven effective can be converted into videos to complement the existing training programs for counselling students. The modules should be made accessible to the practicing counsellors as well. With continuous acquisition of new information on group counselling and skills, the counsellors' competency in group work can be enhanced. This will result in more positive attitude towards their roles and responsibilities. Thus, more group works can be organized and more individuals can receive the help they need.

As a conclusion, the implications mentioned stress the need of providing more exposure particularly training opportunity for counsellor trainees to learn advanced group skills on

a continuous basis to enhance their competency in leading group counselling in general and in managing conflict in specific. It is good if the motivation to seek knowledge comes from within the trainees themselves. However, motivation can be cultivated if they are aware that by having more in depth knowledge and skills, they can better serve others and at the same time advance in their career. Concurrently, the Board of Counsellors should encourage counsellor educators to be creative in their teaching approach by incorporating training modules to better promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and positive attitude towards the group works.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has focused on the discussion of research findings from the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. The discussion looks at each one of the research questions and tries to explain the findings given past research. It also discusses the implications of the findings from the theoretical, methodological, and practical perspectives.