

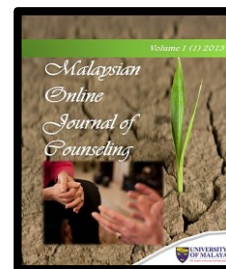
COUNSELING SELF-EFFICACY (CSE) AMONG MALAYSIAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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ABSTRACT

The paper reports a study on how school counselors generate and use counseling efficacy in their work place. This study was a continuation from the first phase studies on emotional intelligence (EQ), counseling efficacy and counselors' commitment to the profession. The overall study involves a quantitative (survey methods) in the first phase, followed by a qualitative research method which is a case study in the second phase. The EQ results from the first phase findings were used to identify the subject to be interviewed in second phase. The criteria of the selected subjects for the second phase were the sampel with the highest EQ scores on each EQ domain and the lowest EQ scores in the first phase study. Four school counselors, two with a high EQ score and two with a low EQ score were interviewed to explore their experience on how they developed and used the counseling efficacy in performing the guidance and counseling services to the students. The data were analyzed using the Browse Nodes, Assay Scope, Matrix Intersection, Document Attribution and Explore Model, Pattern Matching and Explanation Building Technique. The analysis produced three ways on how the school counselors develop their efficacy, which is reflected through three main emerging themes and four main emerging themes on how school counsleors used counseling efficacy in performing counseling services. Results of the study revealed that the generating of Counseling Self-Efficacy is developed through a holistic personality development process, the environmental stimuli resources and the clear perception on the role as a full time school counselor. The results also show that self-efficacy is used while school counselors generate critical thinking, initiate action plan, create self-endurance, and develop the direction for career pathway. The study has proven that counseling efficacy functions as a mechanism in ensuring commitment towards the guidance and counselling services. The implications of these findings for the counseling practice are also discussed.

Keywords: *counseling self-efficacy, school counselors, school counseling and guidance*



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INTRODUCTION

Personal characteristic and professional competencies are critical characteristics for a school counselor in developing students' character. Schmidt (2013) stated school counselors were expected to have a high level of confidence, acquiring various personal and professional competencies to ensure that services rendered will meet the goal of helping students develop and grow. Personal characteristics such as **patient, good listener, compassionate, non-judgmental, research-oriented, empathetic, discrete, encouraging, self-aware, and authentic are crucial in performing role as school counselors** (Studer 2014). Whereas, the professional competencies include knowledge, abilities, skills and attitude related to school counseling program, the foundations, management, delivery, and counselors' accountability are essential in providing effective counselling services.

Past researchers have emphasized the importance of counselors' personalities (Corey 2005, Cormier & Cormier 1998; Combs 1982). Corey (2005) and Cormier and Cormier (1998) believed that *"the most important instrument you have to work with as a counselor is yourself as a person"*. While Jaworski (in Goleman, 1998) stressed that, before anyone could lead and assist others, he needs to be reconciled to himself first and to what and who he truly is. Combs (1982) added that to be effective, a counselor has to rely on his self-trust and personality, not merely on techniques. Jourard and Landsman (1980) stated that healthy personality is reflected when a person shows deep concern for himself and others. The characteristics of an effective counsellor is identified as being knowledgeable, competent and compassionate, as well as having value and self-confidence, passion, power and intimacy. In addition, an effective counselor is flexible and capable of showing both sympathy and empathy, has the ability to analyze himself for herself, has interpersonal awareness, which involves culture-experience awareness, has the ability to be a model and influence others, and makes others a priority (Hilson & Swanson (2013).

The long list of counselors' effective characteristics is critical, as *"counseling can be a hazardous profession and its stresses stem from the nature of the work, the professional role expectations of counsellors and the individual dynamics of the practitioner"* (Corey, 2003:58). Counsellor and therapists too *"....are human, no licensure board or ethical authority can control feeling or emotions"* (Cottoned & Tarvydas, 1998:73). Therefore, counselor has only himself or herself to rely on. Several studies on Malaysian school counselors' (known as counseling and guidance teachers) personal qualities and psychological security found that they experienced a moderate level of stress with average self-endurance and self-confidence (Che Supeni, 2000; Nilmi, 2006; Wan Marzuki, 2007), and 32.68% of 615 full time school counselors in Malaysia was found to not possess self-efficacy (Shahril, 2005). A study by Che Supeni (2000) reported that counselling teachers frequently experience stress and they prefer being a regular teacher than a full-time counsellor. This result was also supported by Siti Halimah's study (2004) which was also concordant with earlier findings by Barret et al. (1997), Riggard and Hansen (1986), Razza (1993), and Michele and Jason (2004). Findings have also proved that there was a decline in the motivational level of the counselors due to a host of reasons (Asrah, 2003; Gambang, 2005; Haslee, 2003; Lukman, 2005; Omar, 1999). The limited data, however, does not explain why counselors were not able to cope with the demands of the profession. The self-efficacy model explains how the ability to estimate or assess the success of accomplishing one's job will influence the degree of one's accomplishment. As counseling can be a hazardous profession, competent self-efficacy helps people to accomplish complex work when arduous jobs are seen as challenges to be faced rather than obstacles to be avoided. A study on counselors' self-efficacy may offer some understanding about the competency of the counselors and is, therefore, justified.

Self-efficacy is a cognitive process which involves measuring individual's confidence level. According to Bandura (1982, 1997, 2003), self-efficacy is a concept which relates to personal belief about the ability to be in control in any given situation. It provides the foundation for individuals to believe in their ability to execute activities and manage situations that they face (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This competence can initiate behavioral change. Self-perception of the ability to act competently and effectively will influence individuals in three ways: (a) behavior management, (b) the choice to get involved or to avoid situations, and (c) perseverance in accomplishing an assignment (Bandura, 1997). Optimism and hopes about one's own ability is a basis for the development of self-efficacy. In other words, it is an indication of confidence in one's self-ability which can assist the accomplishment of expected objectives.

The concept of self-efficacy is based upon the assumption that awareness of self-efficacy will be a connection between a person's knowledge about a task and the reality of doing the task (Larson et.al. 1992). This assumption is supported by Khoo and Tan (2004) who believe that self-efficacy will form an individual's expectations and hopes, and thus influence the actions that will be taken. In the process of executing their actions, individuals with competent self-efficacy will put into practice their personal potentials to achieve their aspirations. Actions will be taken with continuous commitment to ensure aspirations are achieved. This will lead to great success, resulting in the strengthening of self-efficacy (Dacey & Kenny, 1997). This view confirms how self-efficacy can influence an individual's readiness to accomplish tasks and to determine the appropriate ways to achieve success.

It is important to understand that self-efficacy can be learned (Bandura, 1997). Among the sources which can help form self-efficacy are: (a) actual performance achievement experiences, (b) environment, (c) verbal stimulus, and (d) conditions of thoughts, physical well being and emotions. These sources can develop depending on how individuals are treated, the glory and ordeal of their successes and failures, and how they perceive these experience (Mischel 1963, 1973). Thus, if individuals believe they can succeed, they will strive with confidence. Otherwise, if they feel incapable of succeeding, they are faced with failure as a consequence of their lackadaisical attitude towards their own success (Pajares, 1997). This view proves that self-efficacy is a future-oriented belief and involves the way a person feels, thinks, is motivated and behaves when carrying out his duties.

Individuals with competent self-efficacy are found to have interest in complex work. They see challenges to be faced rather than threats to be avoided (Boundreaux, 1998; Lin, 1998; Orpen, 1995; Pajares, 1996; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Zimmerman, 1995). These individuals, therefore, manifest high personal achievement, low stress levels, and are not easily offended (Bandura, 2003; Multon et.al., 1991, Pajares, 1996, 1997). Individuals with incompetent self-efficacy however, will avoid challenging work which is seen as a threat (Betz, 2000). They have low aspirations and commitment towards what they want to achieve. When faced with difficult tasks, they see obstacles rather than possibilities for overcoming the situation. Feeling that they lack the required abilities causes them to easily give up, and consequently experience stress. Nevertheless, the efficacy level of individuals is not consistently the same for all tasks. Perceptions of self-efficacy are subjective and specific to specified tasks (Bandura, 1993, 1997, 2003). Individuals may have competent self-efficacy when dealing with complex social problems but incompetent and dubious self-efficacy when dealing with academic challenges. Marsh et al. (1991) felt that individuals should not compare their self-efficacy with others because it involves personal beliefs which are realistic only when they carry out their specific tasks.

Counseling self-efficacy (CSE) involves a counselor's evaluation of his own ability in carrying out counseling sessions effectively (Larson & Daniel, 1998). Devoted counseling efficacy (CSE) will result in a continuous therapeutic and effective counseling process due to the positive influence of a confident counselor on a client (Corey, 2005). This further proves that competent self-efficacy is important in managing the behavior of students and improving the school climate (Brown, 1999; Rusni, 2004).

Hence, this study was conducted with the purpose of exploring a counselor's ability to generate and use self-efficacy while providing guidance and counseling services. The objectives of the study were to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the counseling efficacy profiles among secondary school counselors in Malaysia?
- b. How do school counselors develop their counseling efficacy?
- c. How do school counselors use the counseling efficacy in counseling and guidance services?

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a case study as the research design. It was a continuation from the first phase studies on emotional intelligence, counseling efficacy and counselors' commitment to the profession. The overall study involves a quantitative (survey methods) in the first phase, followed by a qualitative research method which is a case study in the second phase. A total of three hundred full time school counselors were involved in the first phase study. They responded to Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory (MEQI) developed by Noriah (2005) and General and Counseling Efficacy Instrument (Rorlinda, 2008). The results from the first phase findings, were used to identify the subject to be interviewed in second phase. The criteria of the selected subjects for the second phase were the sample with the highest EQ scores on each EQ domain and the lowest EQ scores in the first phase study. A structured in-depth interview was used to explore the school counselors experience on how they developed and used the counseling efficacy in performing the guidance and counseling services to the students. According to Yin (1984), case study research method will investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. It excels at bringing the understanding of complex issues, extends experience, or adds strength to what is already known through previous research. Creswell and Clark (2007) stated that collecting data using a combination approach (quantitative and qualitative) would provide a deep understanding of the research problem. Therefore, this case study is used to understand how does the school counselors develop their counseling self-efficacy through the process of counseling services and how do they used the counseling self-efficacy in developing their competence.

Respondents in the study were counseling teachers who obtained the highest and the lowest Emotional Intelligence (EQ) score (based on the research findings in the first phase). According to Patton (1990), selection of participants who represent a particular feature is known as purposive sampling. Four counselors were interviewed (two subjects who earned the highest EQ scores and two subjects who earned the lowest EQ scores). According to Patton (1990), there are no rules for determining the sample size in the study of research inquiry because it depends on something to be gained, the purpose of the study, and the time and resources available. Table 1 depicted background information of the case study's respondents

Table 1. Respondents' background information in the case study

Demography elements		School Counselor High EQ (H1)	School Counselor High EQ (H2)	School Counselor Low EQ (L1)	School Counselor Low EQ (L2)
Gender		Female	Male	Male	Female
Age		39	43	44	40
District		Gombak	Klang	Petaling	Hulu Langat
EQ Domain	Overall EQ domain scores	(Sample #EQ 97)	(Sampel #EQ 244)	(Sample #EQ 13)	(Sample #EQ 264)
Self awareness	78.68	97.41	95.69	67.24	56.03
Self regulation	79.38	87.03	95.68	62.70	57.84
Self motivation	78.69	98.40	100.00	66.40	46.80
Empathy	83.05	94.63	94.63	69.27	64.88
Social skills	77.83	93.33	89.44	62.22	63.33
Spirituality	95.89	100.00	100.00	88.89	89.44
Maturity	94.58	100.00	100.00	80.00	80.00

Data collection in this study (case study in second phase) involved an interview, using interview protocol that was developed to guide the interview session. Construction of the protocol interview in this study is in accordance with the guidelines for focus group questioning protocol (Krueger, 1994) which involves five types of questions; namely; the opening question, the question of identity, the question of transition, the key question and the question of closing. The guidelines are accord with the procedures of structured interviews for Life Career Assessment (LCA) by Goldman (1990) in (as cited in Gysbers et al., 2002). LCA is a technique-structured interview designed to help collecting information systematically in a short period. This technique provides a stimulus that can evoke the response of subjects with an emphasis on the concept of a holistic study of the life of one's career. This is done by focusing on the exploration stage of the respondent's functionality in career development, internal and external dynamics that may be involved.

Each participant was interviewed separately. All interview sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the Browse Nodes, Assay Scope, Matrix Intersection, Document Attribution & Explore, Pattern Matching and Explaining Building Technique to identify themes. The coding technique using NVivo software has produced some main themes that consist of several sub themes, made up into one category to answer the research questions; (a) How do school counselors develop their counseling efficacy? and (b) How do school counselors use the counseling efficacy in counseling and guidance services? Briefly, a number of main themes and subthemes (supported features that reflect the main theme) were represented in one category.

RESULTS

3.1 Counseling Self-Efficacy Profiles among School Counselors in Malaysia

The profile in Table 2 describes the percentage or five domains of counseling self-efficacy (CSE) and general self-efficacy domain. The total percentage of five counseling efficacy domains were

summed and divided into five to obtain the average score. Counseling self-efficacy (CSE) represented by five domain; (a) efficacy on the micro skills, (b) efficacy while implementing the counseling process, (c) efficacy to deal with problematic client behavior, (d) efficacy of cultural awareness and (e) efficacy on value awareness. General efficacy was viewed separately in the domain.

Table 2. Percentage Score of Counseling Self-Efficacy among Respondents

Counseling Self-Efficacy Domains	% of Counseling Self-Efficacy
Self-efficacy on Micro Skills	83.37
Self-efficacy on Counseling Process	82.12
Self-efficacy to Deal with Problematic Client Behavior	70.61
Self-efficacy of Cultural Awareness	78.75
Self-efficacy on Values Awareness	86.91
Average score of counselling self-efficacy	80.35
General self-efficacy	80.17

The average percentage score of CSE domains in this study is 80.35% and the general efficacy score is 80.17%. Efficacy in values awareness (86.91%) scored higher than efficacy in micro skill (83.37%), followed by efficacy in the implementing of the counseling process (82.12%), the efficacy of culture awareness (78.75%) and ended with efficacy in dealing with problematic clients behavior (70.61%). The average score of counseling self-efficacy (CSE) was 80.35%, whereas the general self-efficacy score was 80.17. It can be concluded that the counselors have a moderate overall counseling efficacy with various emphasis (medium to high) on the domains studied. CSE profile figures that showed an exceeding score from the average percentage (80.35) are efficacy in the values awareness, micro skills, and efficacy during implementing counseling. On the contrary, self efficacy in cultural awareness and dealing with clients problematic behavior is less than average score.

3.2 Findings on how do school counselors develop their counseling efficacy

In general, the data analysis has showed that, there are three ways on how the school counselors build or develop their efficacy, namely through; (a) the process of holistic personality development, (b) the stimulation from the environment that generates mature career personality, and (c) clarification of the ideas on school counselors professional roles. There are few main themes emerged for each ways.

Data analysis on the interview has identified seven emerging themes for the development of holistic personality, including (a) cautious thinking which stimulates maturation (five sub-themes that reflected the themes are; the ability to evaluate one's own strengths and weaknesses, the tendency to have objectives, open-mindedness to enhance creativity, the ability to reflect and influence change, and the potential to analyze constructively), (b) emotional stability in forming effective relationship (four emerging sub-themes that reflected the themes are; emotional sensitivity, readiness to appreciate others, practicing empathy skills, and delighting in satisfaction and security), (c) honesty in self-sourcing that spur the professional spirits (five emerging sub-themes that reflected the theme are self-acknowledgment, fostering interests through retooling

experiences, generating desires to emulate successful individuals, internalizing spiritual values, and physiology level evaluation, (d) generating harmonious work relations (five sub-themes that emerged are to hasten conflict resolution, continual conflict resolution, overcoming conflicts quietly, interactions with various parties, and creating a teamwork working culture), (e) the strong urge to assist (six sub-themes that emerged are the awareness of self-capabilities, the preference to facilitate, the initiative to improve, the acceptance of new things, the courage to be responsible, internalizing the drives to achieve), (f) endurance in facing challenges that lead to success (two sub-themes that emerged are: perseverance, determination in facing and overcoming obstacles), (g) persistence in gaining knowledge and acquiring skills (two sub-themes that emerged are: to increase knowledge, and to improve skills formally and via external sources).

Next, the second ways of how school counselor develop counseling efficacy, namely the environment stimulation that generates mature career personality had identified three main themes, include (a) desire to emulate competent role model (five emerging sub-themes that reflected model's competencies; self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy skills, social skills), (b) career competencies generated by personal experiences (three emerging sub-themes: satisfaction working experiences that promote an efficient career, process experiences that guided self-evaluation, input experiences that aid in achieving objectives) and (c) satisfaction experiences based on students' personality changes (three emerging sub-themes reflected the situation are, input experiences that aid students' to lead effective lives, process experiences that assist students' self-evaluation, and output experiences that help students to change).

Finally, the third way of how school counselor developed counseling efficacy, namely the clarity of ideas on professional counselors' role, had identified two main themes that surfaced, namely; (a) sense of responsibility in guiding (three emerging sub-themes that reflected; clear objective of guiding services, awareness of the function and work scope of the guidance teacher) and (b) sense of responsibility in counseling work (three emerging sub-themes that reflected the role; clear counseling objectives, competent counseling skills, and practicing counseling ethics). As an overall, there are forty-seven sub-themes identified from the interview data; thirty emerging sub-themes from the first way, eleven from the second, and six from the third way on how school counselors developed their counseling self-efficacy.

3.3 Finding on how do school counselors use the counseling self-efficacy in counseling and guidance services

Further analysis of the data found that the school counsleors would utilize their counseling self-efficacy in four situations; while (a) generating critical thinking processes, (b) shaping forceful actions, (c) enduring difficult situations, and (d) determining the course and direction of career development. For the first situation, two emerging themes that emerged are; (a) developing critical thinking (three sub-themes that reflected the situation; evaluating personal strengths, identifying insufficient personal qualities, and self-acceptance), and (b) devising ways to control situations (two sub-themes that reflected the situation; analytical thinking and serious commitment). For the second situation, two themes that emerged are; (a) acceptance of self-ability (three sub-themes: belief in one's own ability, assuming the types of actions to be taken, and assessing the results from the actions), (b) choices made to influence achievement (four sub-themes: strategy planning, confidence and boldness in undertaking responsibilities, delighting in the glory of success, and continual endurance). Finally, the third situation was reflected by two themes; (a) approaches to controlled-thinking when facing threats (three emerging sub-themes: rational and emotional approaches and actions) and (b) approaches to controlled actions when facing threats (two

emerging sub-themes: face with courage and avoid calmly). Finally, two themes that emerged for the fourth situation; (a) readiness to achieve career objectives (two emerging sub-themes that reflected the situation; willingness to carry out responsibilities and being prepared to internalize values) and (b) readiness in generating career competency (three sub-themes that reflected the situation; in-depth interest, relationship-building, increase in knowledge and enhancement of skills in the field).

DISCUSSION

It is clear that the results supported Bandura's (1997) two major claims regarding self-efficacy, first; self-efficacy can be learned, and second, the sources of the learning process are the experience of actual performance, achievement, environment, stimulus, and condition of thoughts. The school counselors in this study have a moderate overall counseling efficacy. Counseling self-efficacy (CSE) is an important competency to manage students' behaviors and improve the school climate (Brown, 1999; Rusni, 2004). Therefore, a continuous effort on developing counseling efficacy among school counselors is crucial. As the analysis revealed the participants had generated their self-efficacy. The process is found to be implicitly embedded in the holistic personality development process, environmental stimuli resources, and the clear perception of a role as a full time school counselor. Although the sources of generating self-efficacy was categorized differently from what Bandura had suggested, these sources may, however, develop differently depending on individuals' experiences and how they perceived those experiences (Mischel 1963, 1973).

The results also show that counseling self-efficacy has influenced counselors in their work related behavior. It generated critical thinking, initiation of action plans, creation of self-endurance, and development of the direction for a career pathway. It is clear that the counselors in the study had estimated their abilities in carrying out their duties positively (Larson & Daniel, 1998). In other words, they were confident to undertake a particular job, which they believed they had the ability to execute. With such confidence, the counselors may have carried out their jobs effectively. As proven by Corey (2005), devoted counseling self-efficacy (CSE) will result in a continuously therapeutic and effective counseling process due to the positive influence of a confident counselor on a client. The fact that numerous studies in the past have proven the relationship between confidence and competence with a high quality counseling professional (Brammer, 1999; Rogers, 1961), it is no surprise that internalizing self-efficacy has a great impact on a counselor's performance. This statement was supported by the present study that showed the relationship between developing and utilizing counseling self-efficacy could enhance the school counselors' confidence and competence. The more confident the school counselors are, the more resilient they will be.

Results of this study offer several theoretical and practical implications for the potential use of the self-efficacy in guidance and counseling training and practice in Malaysia. With the limited data been taken into consideration, theoretically, self-efficacy model which includes the features of efficacy development and method of use can be a useful model in building or strengthening guidance and counseling competencies among school counselors. The responsible authorities, including the Ministry of Education, State Education Departments and District Education Departments can introduce initiatives to empower the school counseling profession by including a program to enhance counselors' self-efficacy. Counselors may be offered opportunities to participate in activities that would enhance their self-efficacy such as undergoing the Multiple Intelligence (MI) competency assessment to assist them in determining the quality of their MI

competency, attending relevant courses, carrying-out personal and professional group therapy, and a mentorship program, to mention a few.

This study has special implications on institution, which offers counseling training programs. The training approaches on school counselors education program has to take into consideration, to expose students to various experiences and challenging activities. The experiential and authentic learning followed by critical reflection could actually develop the insightful thinking that leads to confident and competent counselors.

The long process of self-efficacy or self-confidence development implies that the selection procedure for a counseling program candidate may require a holistic approach whereby the selection criteria may be extended beyond academic records. Information on personalities with special traits, career interest, multiple intelligence, and interview performance may be part of the standard criteria. This is to ensure that the successful candidates possess personal qualities that match the demands of the counseling job. The results show that mastery learning during counseling training could generate creativity, open-mindedness and social competence. Therefore, it is important for training institutions to introduce a policy, which may require trainees to participate in co-curriculum activities both individually, and in groups. The co-curriculum should be designed to develop social competency, which includes inter-cultural skills. Aside from that, a systematic implementation of guidance and counseling activities through a school-based attachment program can work towards building confidence, independence and collaboration. In short, counseling self-efficacy competencies can boost counselors' confidence and skills when carrying out responsibilities in schools.

The research findings also indicate that counseling educators or trainers (the lecturers who trained school counselors) play an important role as role models for the counselor trainees. The trainers or counseling educators' personality, which reflects the quality of counseling professionalism, invites trainees to emulate the trainers' leadership. Hence, the research suggests that lecturers (or supervisors who train counselors) to use humanistic approach by showing the willingness to share life experiences in an effort to shape people. Besides that, the trainer should provide hands-on counseling practice activities and techniques or through viewing taped real life counseling sessions, that will help develop interest and confidence among counseling trainees. Finally, a clear and constructive feedback by the trainer, with creative and innovative ways in carrying out responsibilities will lead to the development of skilful careers among counselor trainees.

The participants found that any kind of supports and acknowledgements received were perceived as stimulants, which could help to develop their confidence in carrying out their responsibilities. The important of environmental stimulus implying that school headmaster should work towards creating nurturing environments in schools, such as practice Emotional Competence based leadership, offer courses relating to develop self-efficacy competency in the In-Service Training Programs, and other activities, to increase awareness on the importance of acknowledging other people's work among the school community.

The findings of this study also suggest that counselors need to be creative in getting the supports, identifying personnels who have potentials and interests to be in the task force team, inform the school community on roles and expertise of the counselors, approach work systematically while maintaining students' interest as the prime goal. There are other initiatives that might increase support from school and outside school community.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the study had shown the importances of counseling self-efficacy in developing the school counselors' confidence that will lead to an effective guidance and counseling services. It is clear that counselors who participated in the study had developed their self-efficacy from their experiences as counselors in the school setting. It is also clear that the school counselors (in this study) used self-efficacy in their work with students. As self-efficacy is related to high performance, and the self-efficacy can be learned, a serious and continuous effort to enrich the environment which could enhance counselor's self-efficacy is imperative.

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