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SOLUTION-FOCUSED THERAPY AS A COUNSELLING STRATEGY IN ASSISTING STUDENTS EXPOSED TO CONFLICTS OVERCOME PSYCHO-SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN GOMBE STATE

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ABSTRACT
This paper examined Solution-Focused therapy as a Counselling Strategy in assisting Students Exposed to Conflicts Overcome psycho-social Adjustment and Academic Achievement in Gombe State. The paper was able to X-rayed the components of psycho-social adjustment which students of junior secondary schools were exposed to and these include self-esteem, emotional adjustment, personality adjustment and relationship adjustment. The definitions and how counsellors can make effective use of Solution-Focused Therapy were equally discussed. The overview of junior secondary school students and the reasons why junior secondary school students used to have this conflicts was examined and presented in the paper. Conclusions were made as well as recommendations among which are Solution-focused therapy is effective therapeutic technique for treating conflicts of junior secondary school students. Therefore practicing counsellors and therapists should adopt the use of these technique in counselling among junior secondary school students in order to modify and treat conflict related behaviours.
KEYWORDS: *Pycho-Social, Adjustment, Solution-Focused Therapy, Academic Achievement, Counselling, Conflicts.*

INTRODUCTION

Psycho-social adjustment is how an individual function effectively in the society. It refers to sound relationship between a person and the environment. Psycho-social adjustment is defined as a process where one behaves in order attain a state of equilibrium and harmony with oneself, others, and the environment (Halamandaris & Power, 2019). Well-adjusted individuals play their roles well and fit well in their social contexts. Psycho-social adjustment can be viewed from two perspectives: as an achievement and as a process. As an achievement, Psycho-social adjustment means how efficiently duties are performed in different situations. Psycho-social adjustment as a process focuses on developmental changes in an individual psychologically and socially from birth. From birth only, the child depends on his parents for provision of his needs (Halamandaris & Power, 2019). Slowly with growth and development, a child learns to interact and adjust to the external environment.

Psycho-social adjustment is a unique event of an individual in social interrelations which covers different features several of which are related with the values of the society while others are linked with the behavioural norms of an individual's personality. Good and satisfactory social relationships are most important factor in psycho-social adjustment which in turn helps in positive development and shapes up the future of an individual (Wintre, & Yaffe, 2020). Lack of skills in developing social relations leads to psycho-social disorder related to lack of social cohesion.

Psycho-social adjustment is of two types: Normal and Abnormal adjustment. Normal adjustment means when the interaction between individual and his social environment is according to the set norms. Abnormal adjustment or maladjustment means when the interaction between individual and his environment is not according to the set standards. Psycho-social adjustment helps to maintain balance between the oneself and environment and leads to acceptance. Psycho-social adjustment arises from satisfaction of psychological needs through social networks (Wintre, & Yaffe, 2020). When the environment conditions change, it activates the interpersonal activities which helps in achievement of needs and it also increase the expectation for meeting of needs in future.

Researches in psycho-social adjustment of students are conducted in order to discover ways to decrease pressure and increase the positive aspects of their understanding throughout the world. Halamandaris and Power (2019) describe psychosocial adjustment as emotional well-being, absence of loneliness, depression and a state of satisfaction with social and academic life. When beginning their studies, students face several academic and socio-cultural challenges. Research conducted in the 1960s and 1970s conceptualized adaptation in terms of student performance (Halamandaris & Power, 2019). As this early research indicated, the main objective of many students is to attain the highest academic achievement. Psycho-social adjustment of students is very essential because of its positive correlation with academic performance.

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Moreover, Tseng (2017) states that students face four major categories of adjustment problems such as general living, educational, socio-cultural, and personal-emotional adjustment. General living adjustment includes adjustment to living situation, financial issues, conditions, norms, values, rules and regulations. Personal-emotional adjustment relates to dealing with loneliness, disturbance, homesickness, isolation, hopelessness, and loss of identity status. Similarly, educational adjustment issues include course loads, difficulty in doing assignments and preparing for examinations, lack of prior knowledge about a field of study and socio-cultural adjustment like language problem, accommodation difficulties, dietary restrictions, loneliness, and a sense of loss. Researchers assert that social and personal emotional adjustments often collapse under the brand of "psycho-social adjustment" (Halamandaris & Power, 2019; Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2012).

Entering school life requires students to face many changes, including changes in their living preparations, educational environments, and companionship networks, while adjusting to better freedom and responsibility in their private and academic lives. Even though many students can be changed successfully by the university life, others may experience lasting emotional maladjustments and hopelessness (Wintre & Yaffe, 2020). This is an implication that one third of students drop out of secondary schools, while those that proceed to higher institutions may not come out good results of degree.

COMPONENTS OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

Emotional Adjustment

Emotional adjustment is the maintenance of emotional equilibrium in the face of internal and external stressors. This is facilitated by cognitive processes of acceptance and adaptation. Adjustment is a process that helps a person to lead a happy and contented life while maintaining a balance between his needs and his capacity to fulfill them. It enables him to change his way of life according to the demands of the situation and gives him the strength and ability to bring about the necessary changes in the conditions of his environment. Emotional development is one of the major aspects of human development. Man's emotional make-up has always been linked with his physical, mental, intellectual, social, moral and aesthetic development, ever since the development of psychology as a behavioural science. The adjustment process is affected and modified by the individual's experiences and thus learning plays a significant part in the aiding adjustment.

Emotional adjustment referred to the adjusting ones in any given situation. Emotion influences every stage of one's life. Thus, emotional adjustment can easily be defined as the ability of an individual to deal successfully with other people. Our reactions are life's situations will greatly be deepened on our emotional adjustment. Emotional adjustment involves feeling, thinking, understanding of emotions of one's own and others. Every individual from the time he or she steps out of the family and goes to school makes a long series of adjustments between the whole unique personality and the environment. The ardent desire of each boy and girl to become a person having a healthy physique, a growing intellectual ability, a greater degree of emotional poise, and increased participation in social groups, such characteristics enhance one's personality. Even parents, teachers, and other significant members of the society to which person belong will encourage this desire.

Self-Esteem Adjustment

Self-esteem is a concept that has been extensively studied in the psychological literature and may be defined as "the individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality" (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 2015). Harter (2013) defined self-esteem slightly differently by referring to it as "the level of global regard that one has for the self as a person". Self-esteem is related to a number of variables that may lead to better adjustment and academic performance of students. For example, happiness (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2016), life-satisfaction (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2013), self-efficacy (Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2014), a deep learning approach (Phan, 2010) and low levels of stress (Abouserie, 2014) have all been found to be related to a student's level of self-esteem. Students who have less non-persistence decisions have been reported to display a higher level of self-esteem and to feel more positive about completing academic tasks (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated that there is a positive association between self-esteem and the important educational variables of adjustment (Crede & Niehorster, 2019); and academic performance (Woodard & Suddick, 2012).

Research has also shown that there is a link between self-esteem and adjustment for students. That is, researchers have repeatedly found a positive relationship between self-esteem and all four dimensions of adjustment (Napoli & Wortman, 2018; Wintre & Yaffe, 2020; Yaffe, 2017). In a survey investigating the relationship between self-esteem, family and friend support, academic support programs and adjustment to university, Grant-Vallone et al. (2003-2004) reported that students with high levels of self-esteem and friend support were better adjusted academically and socially at university.

As the majority of studies between self-esteem and academic performance have been correlational in nature there is disagreement about the directionality of the relationship. That is, does high self-esteem lead to better academic performance or does good overall academic performance lead to higher levels of self-esteem? Hence, systematic research is needed to establish if self-esteem predicts academic performance or if academic performance predicts self-esteem.

Personality Adjustment

The psychology of personality is a very broad topic, to which people have taken diverse theoretical approaches. Personality is easy to observe but hard to pin down. According to Allport (2011) personality is the dynamic organization within the person of the psychological and physical systems that underlie that person's patterns of actions, thoughts, and feelings. What dynamics are assumed, however, and what systems are proposed to underlie those dynamics vary greatly across theoretical viewpoints. Personality psychology is partly about what makes everyone the same and partly about what makes

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people differ from each other. That is, personality theories are partly statements about human nature: assertions that people are basically (for example) biological creatures, social creatures, self-protective, self-actualizing, or learning creatures. To understand the person, one has to adopt some view of the essence of human nature.

Personality also concerns individual differences. Individual differences can be found on any dimension imaginable, but the so-called five-factor model (has been widely adopted as a consensual framework. The five factors are most commonly labelled extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. In this view, these broad dimensions are key determinants of behaviour, and the aggregation of information resulting from a person's placement on these dimensions gives a reasonably good snapshot of what that person is like. Each broad trait is composed of multiple facets, which provide a more nuanced picture. Broad adoption of the five- factor model does not mean unanimity about it. There are staunch advocates of other frameworks, including two three-factor models, an alternative five-factor model, and a six-factor model (Ashton, 2014). Indeed, some important traits do not fit smoothly into the five-factor framework. For example, optimism has overtones of both extraversion and neuroticism, but does not quite fit either construct.

Relationship Adjustment

Relationship adjustment is also known as social adjustment. Social adjustment is a term that refers to a person's adjustment process in the context of interaction with the surrounding environment. Social adjustment is a process that lasts a lifetime and is carried out by each individual so that he can play a role and function in his life, where individuals make adjustments in dealing with the environment and fellow humans. Humans as social beings cannot stand alone, they need other people to cooperate and help each other to fulfill all their needs such as individual needs for association, acceptance, and recognition of others for themselves. Madariaga, Arribillaga, and Zulaika (2019) state that Social adjustment signifies the capacity to react affectively and completely to social realities, situation and relations do that the requirements for social living are fulfilled in an acceptable and satisfactory manner."

Overview of Junior Secondary Students' Exposed to Conflict

Conflict can impede educational access and quality through resource reductions caused by the destruction or occupation of schools, decreased funding for education, or a diminished teaching force as staff stop attending due to perceived risks. Attendance wanes where students become combatants or avoid schools deemed unsafe, especially where schools are targets of violent attacks, sites of rebel recruitment, or travel to school leaves children vulnerable to kidnapping or sexual assault. Furthermore, attendance and learning may be indirectly influenced when conflict results in increased poverty or food insecurity. In these situations, households may struggle with the cost (or opportunity cost) of sending a child to school and children may suffer malnutrition, which limits cognitive abilities in the short- term and long-term, especially when experienced in early childhood (Wehr, Paul & Ann, 2018).

Research supports the relationship of conflict and reduced educational outcomes. Cross-national analyses find that conflict slows school access during periods of conflict (Angaye, 2013), which can diminish human capital stocks in the long-term. Case study research strongly confirms these findings, with evidence from Bosnia (Otite, 2016), Tajikistan Rwanda (Otite, 2016), Cote d'Ivoire (Francis, 2017), and Colombia (Wehr, Paul & Ann, 2018) for drops in educational attainment among conflict-affected populations. While drops in education during conflict are well-documented, research acknowledges that broader factors of instability, rather than conflict per se, may induce these declines (Angaye, 2013).

Although research clearly points to the tendency of conflict to undermine educational attainment, the consequences for educational inequality are less clear, explored mostly through case studies with differing results. Inequality will rise when educational declines during conflict are borne disproportionately by disadvantaged groups. Several of the mechanisms through which conflict threatens education, in theory, leave less-privileged households or individuals more vulnerable to educational challenges. For example, when conflict leads to economic declines or food shortages, as is often the case (Wehr, Paul & Ann, 2018), poor families may be less able to fund their children's education or to provide the nutritional staples that underpin strong cognitive development. In an example of rising gender inequality, Francis (2017) shows that educational attainment among women, particularly poor women, suffered more than that of men during civil war, reinforcing preexisting gender gaps in education in Tajikistan.

Challenges of Solution-Focused Therapy

The challenges confronting the use of Solution-Focused Therapy varies from place to place. Aside the material challenges that limit the use of counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy, the experience of counsellors can also pose a challenge to victim's access to counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy. Aluede, McEachern and Kennym (2015) opined that factors limiting counselling service using Solution Focused Brief Therapy include a greater emphasis on specialization, credentialing and licensing in the USA. Issues such as lack of insurance coverage and general economic disadvantage also pose a challenge to the use of counselling services. These challenges need to be addressed for it to make positive impact on conflict prone areas across the country.

Egbo (2015) classified the challenges of counselling services using Solution-Focused Therapy to include those induced by the government such as inadequate funding, those from the counsellor such as attitude and qualification as well as those from the counselee such as lack of awareness. This implies that the challenges to availability and adequacy of counselling services is multi-faced and as such require a comprehensive and all-inclusive approach to deal with these challenges. Studies show that there are several challenges facing counsellors in performing their guidance and counselling duties.

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Lack of Formal Training for Guidance and Counselling Teachers

The traditional practice has been that guidance and counselling in schools is conducted by teachers who do not have any formal training or knowledge obtained from the classroom but it is conducted based on the experience, age and wisdom (Patton & McMahon, 2022). Today, training in guidance and counselling is important given the pressure emanating from the changing nature of behaviour management among the youngsters. However, studies on guidance and counselling services reveal the ineffectiveness of this program as the policy and decision makers are ill informed (Patton & McMahon, 2022). The fact that the policy and decision makers are ill informed has a huge implication on the drafting of the policies.

The challenges of teacher counsellors in the guidance and counselling and discipline management are inadequate human resources and financial limitations were the major challenges encountered (Mahlangu, 2021). Relevant skills in guidance and counselling are not optional in a school, but something that is mandatory. Practical skills and theories are necessary for an effective guidance and counselling programme. In Kenya, guidance and counselling units were made part of the educational curriculum in colleges and universities. Despite the integration of these units in the educational curriculum, this course could seem as being ineffectively handled (Bernard, 2022). Basically, having information on guidance and counselling without relevant skills has been identified as a drawback towards effective solving of student problems.

In a study by Chepkirui (2021) reveals that 62% of teacher counsellors in Bureti District were appointed as the heads of guiding and counselling departments without any prior training on their roles or responsibilities. Arudo (2018) on the other hand confirms that numerous schools have got teachers counsellors who were in office by title but were offering very limited services to the students. This finding led to the recommendation that the teacher counsellors require training in the guidance and counselling (Arudo, 2018). Adequate training and knowledge would help them effectively and successfully discharge their duties.

Technological and social changes and educational demands for counselling have been identified as the factors that engineer the need for training among teacher counsellors (Ndichu, 2005). The youth in schools are exposed to technology today more than before. Unless trained on the implication of the changing technology, the teacher counsellors stand to exhibit skills deficit in some aspects of counselling. This could effectively hamper their duties of guidance and counselling.

Teachers Counsellors' Workload

In 1964, the government of Kenya recommended the provision of guidance and counselling services. The teacher counsellors were also to be allowed adequate time to attend to the student needs. Presently, teachers offer their academic duties besides those of counselling in majority of the secondary schools. However, guiding and counselling is considered by majority of the teachers as subsidiary and hence dedicate more of their time on academic duties as compared to the counselling duties. Arudo (2018) clearly points out that teacher counsellors technically absent to offer counselling services because they were highly overwhelmed by the academic workload. The examination-centered nature of the education system in Kenya has been partially blamed as being the reason why teachers engage much in academic activities at the expense of offering guiding and counselling duties (Chepkirui, 2021). This means that a study had to be done to indicate how teachers perceived guiding and counselling in relation to academic duties and responsibilities.

A report indicates that high school student's enrolment as being a possible challenge to effective implementation of guidance and counselling (Gatheru, 2022). The number of students enrolling in secondary school is higher than before. However, the number of teachers in return does not correspond to the increase in the number of students. The shortage of teachers means that the few available ones have to engross themselves first with the academic duties after which any other duties may later follow (Wambui, 2021). Furthermore, the high enrolment means that teachers will not be in a position to conclusively address the needs of individual students as they are overwhelmed. This high enrolment could be a possible challenge in the implementation of guidance and counselling programme in public secondary schools in Ndeiya Division, Kiambu County.

Religious Beliefs and Attitudes

The school as a societal component encompasses the non-academic staff, teachers, parents and students. Studies have revealed that some of the parents perceive guiding and counselling as being an intrusion of the privacy of their children (Yadeta, Bedane, & Tura, 2021). Teacher counsellors have consequently been profiled as a threat to the school by some parents (Bernard, 2022). The skepticism of the school principals on the competence of the teacher counsellors is also a challenge since any progress by the teacher counsellors will be perceived as being a threat to their position of leadership (Yadeta et al., 2021). The poor working conditions of teachers and the poor pay could be demoralizing to the teachers' and hence affecting their attitude in both academic and guiding and counselling work.

Religion has also been found as playing a key role in being a challenge on effective implementation of the guidance and counselling programme (Yusuf, 2024). Whereas teacher counsellors are willing to assist the teachers on the various counselling issues that they face, religious beliefs are a drawback to them. For instance, the sensitive nature of abortion and drug use raises ethical issues from the various religious denominations. The religious differences and beliefs practically and effectively challenges the implementation of guidance and counselling programme.

Inadequate Resources

Adequate resources and equipment are essential in provision of effective guidance and counselling services (Lehr, 2022). Counselling and resource rooms with private cubicles are necessary for effective guiding and counselling services. However, with little funding among the public schools in Kenya, some of these facilities and equipment could not be a priority to them. In many instances, priority will be given to the

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resources and facilities that will facilitate academic achievement. Guiding and counselling while being seen as a secondary programme will have been challenged. The high enrolment of students in schools also means that the facilities are stretched and hence a clear indication that they are inadequate (Kilonzo, 2013). Although there has been no documentation that identifies how resources and facilities are distributed in schools for academic and counselling purposes, a matter that this study investigated.

Counsellors Role in the use of Solution-Focused Therapy

One of the places where Solution Focused Therapy is of great importance is among people who have suffered a social, economic or psychological challenge such as those in conflict prone areas. However, it is not the existence of a counselling unit in these areas that matter but the quality and quantity of counselling services provided especially the use of Solution Focused Therapy for the quick recovery of these victims. This goes a long way in the total recuperation of these individuals. It is therefore the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure the provision of all resources needed for professional counselling to be provided for students exposed to conflicts.

Mogbo, Obumneke-Okeke and Anyachebelu (2021) opine that one of the ways of achieving availability of counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy is by providing adequate financial and human resources. It is through this measure that adequate counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy can be provided for all levels of people across different levels of the society. This is because; for counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy to be provided as expected, there must be the availability of the needed human and material resources. This is where finance plays a major role and when this is done, a complete counselling services package can be provided for all categories of students exposed to conflicts irrespective of differences in their economic, educational, social and physical orientation.

Counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy may not be provided when the needed resources for work are not available. Mogbo et al (2021) further opined that, for a counsellor to carry out his work professionally the Counsellor should be given a standard office located in a place where privacy is possible. At least two rooms should be provided, the clerical staff room and the consulting room for counselling. The office should be modestly furnished and comfortable. The basic furniture provision expected in such an office are as follows; Bulletin Board or Notice Board, Bookshelves, Suggestion box for students to slot in their needs and concerns, Special cabinets for storing and retrieving students cumulative record folders, Filling cabinets for files, Audiovisual materials such as projectors, computers, radio and cassettes, Connection to internet facilities/school net, Computer Discs (CDs), empty tapes, desks and laptops, a small library shelf with books, magazines, journals, newspapers and career/vocational information guides.

According to Udoh and George (2014), counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy vary in orientation, style and skill required and all of these are geared towards returning victims back to their normal life. This is why all aspects of counselling using Solution Focused Therapy must be touched in order for victims to be re-integrated fully into the society for a productive life. The counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy that must therefore be provided as suggested by counselling scholars include; professional counselling for career development, personal counselling for private problems, psychotherapeutic counselling, training counselling, consultation counselling, spiritual counselling, health counselling among others. These services are important for the future comfort of students exposed to conflicts.

Utilizing available counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy is an important step towards the overall freedom of victims of social and economic problems living in conflict prone areas. Shrivastava (2023) opines that the essence of counselling using Solution Focused Therapy is to help people become socially adequate and economically productive persons. However, this goal cannot be achieved when these services are not accessed and utilized. It is therefore important for the needed physical and material to be sufficiently provided and placed at the reach of these students exposed to conflicts in other for it to be utilized.

Insufficient information can limit the utilization of counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy. Ndegwa (2013) reveals that people fail to utilize counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy when the counsellor had a vague understanding of what the profession is all about. In addition to this both the counsellor and the counselling unit should provide adequate information that will help the students exposed to conflicts to understand the services available and how it can be of benefit to them. Similarly, stakeholders in need to be fully involved in the provision of counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy as this will provide a robust programme that will be of benefit to all students exposed to conflicts. Lack of involvement of stakeholders also limits the utilization of counselling services using Solution Focused Therapy and as such stakeholders play a significant role in providing an enabling environment that will help them utilize the services provided.

The personal attributes of victims especially when they are faced with such unpleasant situation can also contribute to their determination not to utilize available services. In addition, the personal attribute of the counsellor can also limit their utilization of Solution Focused Therapy. Udoh and George (2014) ascertain that every counsellor should be acquainted with the following: psychodynamic psychotherapy, Solution Focused Therapy, Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), humanistic/existential therapy, mindfulness (CBT), postmodern therapy, family systems therapy, person-cantered therapy, existential therapy, gestalt therapy and eclectic techniques. Access and utilization of counselling services is therefore determined by the attributes of the various stakeholders as well as the environment. This will go a long way in increasing the level of utilization of these counselling services.

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