

COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING LOW SELF-ESTEEM AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey design, and the population comprised of two hundred and fifty-seven (257) respondents from all the six education zones of the state which was studied entirely without sampling because the number was manageable by the researchers. The instrument used in collecting data for the study was a structured questionnaire titled Counselling Strategies for Handling Low Self Esteem Questionnaire (CSHLSEQ). The instrument was dully validated by experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation. The findings from the study showed that the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State are sibling maltreatment, peer relationship, parenting style, inability to cope academically, parental socio-economic status, physical challenge, comparison with others, and preferential treatment by parents and teachers. However, the findings showed that gender, rejection from society and expectation from parents are not the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students. The findings of the study equally showed that the consequences of low self-esteem are poor academic achievement, social isolation, feeling of worthlessness, drug abuse, health problems such as headache and fatigue, cultism, suicidal ideation, school dropout, aggressive behaviour, shyness and social maladjustment. Finally, the results of the study revealed that the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State are cognitive restructuring, self management technique, assertiveness training technique, social skill training, sensitivity training, the use of bibliotherapeutic materials, mindful meditation, exposure therapy, modelling technique, relaxation therapy and enrolling low self esteem students into social groups. It was recommended among others that Guidance Counsellors should ensure keen and objective observation on students' behaviours and guard against such behaviours that could be detrimental to students' self-esteem.

Keywords: Counselling, Strategies, Low self-esteem, Students, Anambra State.

Introduction

Indeed, there is a universal belief that human beings are superior animals. Undoubtedly, this superiority comes with an innate propensity to strive to feel whole. Consequently, people's drive to feel whole is rooted inside the mind, but shaped by the experiences they have within their environment. Therefore, people's experiences and interactions with others affect the way they view themselves as individuals and their understanding of life in general. Human beings therefore are literally what they think in their minds. Hence, an individual's character becomes the complete whole of all that he/she thinks. The way people think about self and the value they place on things play significant role in determining their personal capacity to perform in any given task and the type of relationship they would have with others. This is what psychologists and other scholars referred to as self-esteem.

Conceptually, self-esteem is the opinion you have about yourself, your achievement, how you think others see you and your purpose in life (Obidigbo, 2006). It is defined as the overall reflection of an individual's self-worth which encompasses beliefs about the self as well as the emotional responses to those beliefs (Nwokolo & Oguzie, 2021). Self-esteem refers to the amount of realistic respect that one has for oneself. According to Wang (2008), self-esteem is one's perception of one's abilities, skills, and overall qualities that guide and motivate specific cognitive processes and behaviours in the individual. Historically, James and Mead were among the first people to introduce the concept of self-esteem. They postulated that self-esteem was equivalent to the success of a person divided by his/her pretension. Prihadi and Chua (2012) observed that the more success we achieve, the lower our expectation and pretension and the higher our self-esteem. Okafor, Obi and Oguzie (2018) emphasized that to increase our self-esteem, we have to lower our expectations of ourselves and increase our achievements.

Mukiri and George (2014) classified self-esteem into three (3) groups: the extant self, the desired self, and presenting self. Ahmed (2013) opined that self-esteem is an attitude and expression of worthiness that is also linked to anxiety and depression. Nwokolo and Oguzie (2021) explained that people who feels inadequate and worthless views themselves as inferior and unable to generate inner resources to improve the situation. Therefore, feeling of inferiority may result when one does not meet up to personal aspirations. In their explanation, Nwokolo and Oguzie further suggested four factors that contribute to the development of self esteem. These include, the value students' perceive to have towards themselves, the students' experience with success and their definition of success or failure, as well the style they adopt in dealing with negative feedback and criticism.

Self-esteem can be best described as the degree to which our worthiness is evaluated (Gazzinga & Heatherton, 2010). It is the summary of evaluative judgment of the self as components, successful, virtuous and worthiness (Obidigbo, 2006). Self-esteem involves your strength and weakness, your social status and how you relate with others as well as your ability or independence to stand out on your own feet (Emiler, 2012). Succinctly, self-esteem is the overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way (Grafford, 2009). Shimmack and Diener (2013) noted that self-esteem can mean self-respect, a sense of self-

worth, a feeling of goodness about oneself. Self-esteem also refers to one's attitude towards oneself which may be high or low (Coleman, 2010).

It is understandable that high self-esteem can make a profound difference in how individual feels and functions (Onyekuru & Obidigbo, 2012). Students with high self-esteem tend to feel positive about themselves and about life in general, and this in turn makes them to handle life challenges better. Moreso, people who have high self-esteem focus on growth and improvement, whereas, people with low self-esteem focus on not making mistakes in life (McLeod, 2012). A person with high self esteem perceives himself as a better, more capable and of greater worth than someone with low self-esteem. Indeed, just as individuals differ, their levels of self-esteem also differ. According Nwokolo and Oguzie (2021), people's self-esteem can be high or low. Actually, high self-esteem is very important in students' academic and socio-personal lives.

Low self-esteem is defined as the negative evaluation of one's abilities, feelings and actions as a result of one's pessimistic thoughts (Erol & Orth, 2011). It involves constant self doubt, self criticism, social anxiety and isolation, suppressed anger, loneliness, and shame; individuals with low self esteem tend to perceive themselves and issues of life in a more negative and critical light, they also feel unable to handle the challenges of life (Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018). Low self-esteem can be seen as been unhappy or not been content with your own character or abilities. In the context of this study, low self-esteem is defined as a negative belief, perception, or opinion which an individual have about himself which influences his behaviour and consequently affects his functioning and achievements in life.

Empirically, research has shown that low self-esteem can emanate from child abuse and punishment, peer relationship, parenting style, academic achievement, financial and social position, negligence, comparison with others, preferential treatment, excessive criticism, expectations from parents, physical appearance, bullying, unemployment, ill health and negative experience (Jones, 2012). A person with low self-esteem can exhibit the following characteristics; self-criticism and dissatisfaction, hypersensitivity to criticism, resentment against critics, chronic indecision, exaggerated fear or mistake, excessive will to please others, perfectionism, pessimism and general negative outlook among others.

Furthermore, research has documented that low self-esteem can result to a number of emotional and behavioral problems which ranges from dysphonic emotions, anxiety, depression, loneliness, teenage pregnancy, vulnerability, abuse of alcohol, violence, rape, membership into deviant groups. According to Lawson (2014), low self-esteem can be a terminal condition resulting to death, murder, food disorder, suicide, drug and health related diseases. This claim is supported by a study carried out by Ugorji (2013), who identified adolescents male with low self-esteem as becoming school dropouts, engaging in social vices and also female adolescents as becoming teenage mothers due to low self-esteem and this can jeopardize their educational attainment or result into poor academic achievement. Guindon (2006) enumerated the characteristics of students with low self-esteem to include: withdrawn, shy, unnecessarily quiet, insecure, underachieving, always negative, unhappy, socially inadequate, hostile, depressed, incompetent, having poor communication and no self-confidence.

Various attempts have been made to reduce the negative effects of low self-esteem among students. These include group art therapy, play schemes and bibliotherapy programs (Kim & Won, 2011). However, these intervention techniques possess potential limitations. For instance, many bibliotherapies do not arise from evidence-based research, and at times may mislead the users (Norcross, Santrock, Zuckerman, Sommer & Capbell, 2008). Furthermore, Ashamu (2004) conducted a research on the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy in the treatment of low self-esteem. Methods used include social skills, assertiveness training, peer modelling and cognitive restructuring. The study found significant improvement in those treated assertiveness training and cognitive restructuring. Breldenbush (2007) carried out a study using social skill training and assertiveness training involving 50 students who had low self esteem; the result showed that their self-esteem significantly improved. The students reported enhanced feeling of self worth, perceived themselves in more positive terms and felt adequate. The study showed that there was noticeable improvement in the students' friendship with peers and family relationships with their parents and siblings. Although, cognitive behaviour therapy has been viewed as an effective method of treatment for low self-esteem, there are potential drawbacks inherent to this strategy. For example, cognitive behaviour therapy requires much time, higher expertise and also cost intensive (Scott, 2006). This could make this strategy unattainable for many people. In addition, Emeji (2018) in her study found that self-management technique was effective in reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students.

Generally, the essence of finding a way to improve students' self-esteem cannot be overemphasized considering the fact that they are the future leaders of this country and self-esteem corresponds with emotional and psychological development, which can affect students in a positive or negative way. Self-esteem has been associated with a number of important life's outcome including psychological adjustment academic success, physical satisfaction, health and relationship satisfaction (Pullman & Allik, 2008).

In addition, low self-esteem has been a great challenge to adolescents in Nigeria and elsewhere because adolescence is a phase in the life of a person where self-esteem is known to fluctuate significantly. The problem of low self-esteem has become a serious concern to parents, teachers, counsellors, and the government, among others. Most importantly, this problems emanate from educational, social, cultural, psychological dimension such as parental and educational reason, peer relationship, poor communication between parents and their children, bad parenting style, lack of motivation for success, peer pressure, among others. The period of adolescents is said to be a time of increased mental problems and decreased psychological wellbeing and self-esteem (Mental health foundation, 2010). Currently, low self-esteem has become a great challenge facing both the adolescents and adults in Nigeria. According to Jones and Meredith (2015), it is estimated that half of the adolescents struggle with low self-esteem. To this end, this present study examined the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students?
2. What are the consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students?
3. What are the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students?

Methods

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. According to Nworgu (2015), a survey research design is one in which a group of people is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few group of people considered to be the representative sample of the entire group. Descriptive survey study involves collection of data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Oguzie & Nwokolo, 2021). The population of the study consisted of 257 guidance counsellors in all the public secondary schools in the six education zones of Anambra State. The entire population was studied because it was manageable by the researchers.

The instrument used in collecting data for the study was structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The instrument is titled "Counselling Strategies for Handling Low Self Esteem Questionnaire (CSHLSEQ)". The instrument consists of two parts 1 and 2. Part 1 sought information on respondents' personal data, while part 2 sought information required to answer the research questions. The part 2 was broken into three clusters – A, B and C. The first cluster sought the opinion of the respondents regarding the causes of low self-esteem required to answer research question one, cluster two sought the opinion of the respondents regarding the consequences of low self-esteem required to answer research question two, while the third cluster sought the opinion of the respondents regarding the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem required to answer research question three. The instrument was validated by two of the experts are in the department of guidance and counselling, and the third expert in Measurement and Evaluation, both in Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. To the reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a trail test which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.81, 0.76 and 0.89 were obtained for clusters B1, B2 and B3, respectively. More so, the overall reliability estimate obtained for the instrument was 0.84. The instrument was therefore considered reliable enough to be used for the study. Data collected for the study was analyzed using mean.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State

S/N. Causes of Low Self-esteem	Mean	Remark
i. Child abuse	3.40	Agree
ii. Gender	1.44	Disagree
iii. Peer relationship	3.20	Agree

iv. Parenting style	2.59	Agree
v. Inability to cope academically	2.63	Agree
vi. Parental socio-economic status	3.02	Agree
vii. Rejection from society	2.24	Disagree
viii. Physical challenge and ill health	2.84	Agree
ix. Comparison with others	3.21	Agree
x. Preferential treatment by parents and teachers	2.96	Agree
xi. Expectation from parents	2.00	Disagree

From table 1 above, it is observed that items 1,3,4,5,6,8,9, and 10 obtained mean rating above the criterion mean of 2.50, while items 2, 7 and 11 obtained mean rating less than the criterion mean. This indicates that the respondents agreed that the factors in items 1,3,4,5,6,8,9, and 10 are the causes of low self-esteem among students, while they disagreed that the factors in items 2, 7 and 11 are causes of low self-esteem among students in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What are the consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on the consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State

S/N. Consequences of Low Self-esteem	Mean	Remark
xii. Low self esteem results to poor academic achievement	3.00	Agree
xiii. Low self esteem leads to social isolation	2.59	Agree
xiv. Low self esteem results to the feeling of worthlessness	3.20	Agree
xv. Low self esteem leads to drug abuse	3.06	Agree
xvi. Students with low self esteem often complain of health problems such as headache and fatigue	2.92	Agree
xvii. Low self esteem leads to cultism	2.58	Agree
xviii. Low self esteem results to suicidal ideation	2.73	Agree
xix. Low self esteem encourages school dropout	3.05	Agree
xx. Low self esteem results to aggressive behaviour	2.81	Agree
xxi. Low self esteem leads to shyness	3.06	Agree
xxii. Low self esteem encourages social maladjustment	3.12	Agree

Data in table 2 showed that all the items (12-22) obtained mean rating above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the respondents agreed that all the items are the consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Research Question 3: What are the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 3: Mean rating of respondents on the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State

S/N	Counselling strategies for handling Low Self esteem	Mean	Remark
xxiii.	Cognitive restructuring	3.04	Agree
xxiv.	Self management technique	2.92	Agree
xxv.	Assertiveness training technique	3.01	Agree
xxvi.	Equipping students with Social skill training	2.89	Agree
xxvii.	Creating sensitivity training group for students with low self esteem	2.75	Agree
xxviii.	The use of bibliotherapeutic materials	2.61	Agree
xxix.	Training low self esteem students on mindful meditation	2.73	Agree
xxx.	The use of exposure therapy to increase students' social interaction capacity	2.64	Agree
xxxi.	The use of modelling technique	3.00	Agree
xxxii.	Training low self esteem students with relaxation therapy	2.87	Agree
xxxiii.	Enrolling low self esteem students into social groups	2.91	Agree

Data presented in table 3 revealed that all the respondents agreed to all the items (23-33) which obtained mean rating above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the above mentioned items are counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

Considering the results of the analysis of data made in the study starting with the research questions:

The first research question sought to find out the causes of low self-esteem among the students as perceived school counsellors in the state. The findings showed that the respondents agreed that items 1,3,4,5,6,8,9, and 10 can lead to low self-esteem among students. Hence, the respondents indicated that child abuse, peer relationship, parenting style, inability to cope academically, parental socio-economic status, physical challenge and ill health, comparison with others, and preferential treatment by parents and teachers are the main factors that cause low self-esteem among their students. The finding of this study agrees with the report of previous researchers that found out that low self esteem can emanate from child abuse and punishment, peer relationship, parenting style, academic achievement, financial and social position, negligence, comparison with others, preferential treatment, excessive criticism, expectations from parents, physical appearance, bullying, unemployment, ill health and negative experience (Jones, 2012; Martin, Marsh, McLnerney, Green & Dowson, 2012). This result is also in consonance with the report by Baharuden and Zulkefly (2009) who in their study observed that female and male students did not show any significant difference in self-esteem. However, the respondents disagreed that items 2, 7 and 11 can lead to low self-esteem among students. This finding implies that gender, rejection from society and expectation from parents are not the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students. This finding

of the study contradicts the findings of (Naderi & Abdullahi, 2010; Ahmavaara & Houston, 2014) who reported that gender and rejection from society could lead to low self-esteem. Pepi, Fana and Alesi (2006) stated that boys and girls diverge from their primary source of self-esteem, with girls being more influenced by relationship and boys more influenced by goals related to independence and autonomy while self-esteem of females is more closely drawn to goals characterized by sensitivity and inter dependence.

The second research questions examined consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students. The findings revealed that all the items (12-22) in the questionnaires are elicited by low self-esteem among secondary school students. Most importantly, the respondents strongly agreed that poor academic achievement, feeling of worthlessness, drug abuse, school dropout, shyness and social maladjustment are the major consequences of low self-esteem among students. This finding is in line with previous report by (Guindon, 2006; Silverstone & Salsali, 2008; Ugorji, 2013; Lawson, 2014) who pointed out the characteristics of students with low self-esteem to include: withdrawn, shy, unnecessarily quiet, insecure, underachieving, always negative, unhappy, socially inadequate, hostile, depressed, incompetent, having poor communication and no self-confidence. Uslu (2013) observed that self-esteem influences every area of an individual's life and the academic achievement of students is a phenomenon that has educational, psychological and sociological meaning. In support of Uslu's assertion, Okafor, Obi and Oguzie (2018) emphasized that self-esteem plays a crucial role in academic achievement, career, social and personal responsibility. Rosenberg and Owen (2007) observed that low self-esteem students are more troubled by failure and tend to exaggerate events as being negative. For example, they often interpret non critical comments as critical. They are more likely to experience social anxiety and low levels of interpersonal confidence. This in turn makes social interaction with others difficult as they feel awkward, shy, conspicuous, and unable to adequately express their feelings when interacting with others.

Finally, the last research question examined the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among students. The findings shows the respondents agreed to all the items (23-33). This indicates that cognitive restructuring, self management technique, assertiveness training technique, social skill training, sensitivity training, bibliotherapeutic materials, mindful meditation, exposure therapy, modelling technique, relaxation therapy and enrolling low self-esteem students into social groups are the counselling strategies used by school counsellors in handling low self esteem students. This result supports the findings by (Ashamu, 2004; Breldenbush, 2007; Kim & Won, 2011; Emeji, 2018) who in their various studies found that social skills, bibliotherapy, assertiveness training, peer modelling, self management technique and cognitive restructuring were effective in handling low self-esteem among students. However, the findings of this study contradicts the earlier report by (Norcross, Santrock, Zuckerman, Sommer & Capbell, 2008) who stated that bibliotherapeutic materials are not suitable for people with low self-esteem since many of the materials do not arise from evidence-based research, and at times may mislead the users.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State are sibling maltreatment, peer relationship, parenting style, inability to cope academically, parental socio-economic status,

physical challenge, comparison with others, and preferential treatment by parents and teachers. However, the findings showed that gender, rejection from society and expectation from parents are not the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students. The study was also concluded that the consequences of low self-esteem are poor academic achievement, social isolation, feeling of worthlessness, drug abuse, health problems, such as headache and fatigue, cultism, suicidal ideation, school dropout, aggressive behaviour, shyness and social maladjustment. Finally, it was concluded that cognitive restructuring, self management technique, assertiveness training technique, social skill training, sensitivity training, the use of bibliotherapeutic materials, mindful meditation, exposure therapy, modelling technique, relaxation therapy and enrolling low self-esteem students into social groups are the counselling strategies for handling low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the discussions thereafter, the following recommendations were made:

1. Counsellors should ensure kin and objective observation on students' behaviours and guard against such behaviours that could be detrimental to students' self-esteem and academic achievement.
2. Teachers should observe their students and recommend those with low self-esteem for professional counselling.
3. Significant others such as parents and care-givers should avoid using words that could decrease their children's self-esteem at home.
4. Secondary school authorities should design programmes that will lay emphasis on giving students the opportunities to participate freely and actively in school activities and decision making. It is hoped that this will promote students' self-esteem.

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