

COUNSELLOR'S PERCEPTION OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING AS A COUNSELLING STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING SELF ESTEEM AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated counsellor's perception of cognitive restructuring as a counselling strategy for enhancing self esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State. One research question and one null hypothesis were formulated to guide the study was tested at 0.5 level of significance. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 103 school counsellors in the 291 public Secondary Schools in the area. The number is small and manageable; so no sampling was done. The instrument used was 4-item questionnaire. The instrument was validated by three experts from Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; two from Guidance and Counselling and one from measurement and evaluation. Mean, with standard deviation and t-test statistics were used for data analysis. The study revealed, among others that Guidance counsellors perceive Cognitive Restructuring as a counselling strategy for enhancing self-esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State. Secondly, it was also found out that there is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female counsellors on cognitive restructuring for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State. The study recommended, among others, that counsellors should provide psychosocial and educational assistance to youths, hence, achieving a mental sane society, which will give rise to high self esteem of youths.

Keywords: Counsellor, Perception, Cognitive Restructuring Strategy, Self esteem, Secondary School Students.

Introduction

Cognitive beliefs (rational thought) about oneself can challenge beliefs that lead to self destructive behaviours. These destructive behaviours are mostly prevalent among secondary school students and could be viewed as social and psychological problems with unavoidable consequences. These social problems are depression, hopelessness, anxiety, panic disorders, substance abuse, personality disorder, schizophrenia and illicit sexual behaviour. Sexual and psychological problems among Secondary School Students are persistently and seemingly becoming a norm contrary to established social values. This is no doubt worrisome, as it is problematic because it has deeply affected their mental health, value system and also caused distractions and removed their focus from serious academic activities.

However, there is need to ascertain the underlying factor to these destructive behaviours among Secondary School Students. The above statement gives the researchers clue to the remedy to the aforementioned destructive activities exhibited by young people, hence, one's characteristics or inclination to express oneself as being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life. These characteristics/traits no doubt call for the enhancement of individual self esteem. Self esteem enhances self reliance, boosts individuals morale to achieve success in academic endeavour and also to surmount challenges of life. According to Sedikides and Gregg (2003), self esteem is a person's subjective appraisal of himself or herself as intrinsically positive or negative in thought, feeling and action. Franzoi (2000) defines self esteem as individual's numerous evaluation of self as being good, bad or mediocre. Sequel to the above definition, Nwankwo, Anyanwu and Idigun (2016) define self esteem as a person's positive or negative judgment of self based on individual's feelings, ability and cognition. A person with high self esteem perceives self as better, more capable and of greater worth than someone with low self esteem. Self esteem is based on the opinions of one self and how one perceives specific experience, Nwankwo et al added. Low self esteem is the absence of confidence in one's thought and reason as a result of been pessimistic while high self esteem is the presence of confidence and self worth both in thought and reason as a result of been optimistic. According to Jones (2003), low self esteem among students may result from various factors such as; physical appearance, weight, social economic status or peer pressure and being bullied by other students. Nwankwo et al (2016) state that students with low self esteem display the following characteristics in the school setting; heavy self criticism and dissatisfaction, hypersensitivity to criticism with resentment against critics, chronic indecision and exaggerated fear or mistake, excessive will to please others, Perfectionism, dwelling on the magnitude of past mistakes, Pessimism and a general negative attitude. Students with high self esteem display the following characteristics; high self confidence, highly objective, enhances one's aptitude and ability through past mistakes, hard work, optimistic, creativity, assertiveness, decisiveness, strong and courageous, accept critics for future amendment, always ready to take correction for better performance and positive mindset. However, most of these characteristics are acquired through experience, environment and genetic traits. Depending on any of the above factors (low self esteem or high self esteem characteristic) one still needs to work hard to have a healthy self esteem which affects the overall wellbeing of an individual.

The importance of a healthy self esteem for the bedrock of an individual's existence cannot be underestimated. An individual desiring to work hard in pursuit of a better living brings to

mind one whose self esteem is high; living creatively and using their potentials (Brain, 2009). This simply implies that if self esteem of secondary school students is boosted, it will equip students with necessary characteristics which will in turn elicit the best out of their behaviour. Therefore, it is obvious that not all secondary school students have attained this level of development and as such, the researchers believe that those that have not, need counselling. Counselling as a practice is defined by Aldridge (2014) cited in Ani (2018) as an umbrella term that covers a range of talking therapy. This talking therapy according to him is delivered professionally by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to bring about a change or enhance their well being. United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), (2015) confirms that, counselling Strategies are counselling plans of actions intended to accomplish specific goals.

Therefore, in this study, counselors are expected to make use of cognitive restructuring depending on their perception to resolve the challenges posed by self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu state. Cognitive restructuring or cognitive reframing is the therapeutic process of identifying and challenging or modifying negative and irrational thoughts (cognitive distortions). Cognitive restructuring is an evidence based intervention for the treatment of low mood or anxiety (NIHCE, 2008). Cognitive restructuring is a technique used by counselors in helping individuals understand and modify their cognitions in an effort to live a more meaningful, satisfying, and peaceful existence. It helps people reduce their stress through cultivating more positive and functional thought habits (Mill, Reiss & Dombeck, 2008). Cognitive restructuring was propounded by a psychologist, Albert Ellis in the 1950s; it is a technique or process used in Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT), which is further divided into Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). This (ABC) focuses on the application of learning theory to assess potential behaviour change procedures, the therapy believes that a behaviour learned can be unlearned while Cognitive Behavioural Therapy focuses on thought and feelings, it is meant to find and change inordinate negative thoughts that can lead to depression as a result of combination of genetics, biological factors and experience. In the context of this study therefore, cognitive restructuring simply refers to a set of coordinated counselling process aimed at helping individuals modify and re-organize their mindsets positively towards a more worthwhile and productive self concept and dependable.

Based on the above listed definitions of cognitive restructuring, it means that counselors can use the techniques to correct some abnormal behaviour that can hamper the efficacy of high self esteem among secondary school students, thereby boosting their self worth and confidence. Moreover, the researcher considered gender as one of the variables to assess the effect on counsellors perception of cognitive restructuring strategies for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu state. Bumti (2012) carried out a research on gender as an influence on counselors' view on cognitive restructuring in Eastern states and the result shows that adolescent females have high self esteem than adolescent males. Coincidentally, in this study, the guidance counselors are both males and females. These counsellors have indefinite method or process of using cognitive restructuring as counselling strategy for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students, in Enugu state. The difficulties and challenges confronting most counsellors in practicing cognitive restructuring for enhancing self esteem among secondary are not hidden, as government displays nonchalant attitude to counselling practices, which results in poor counselling experiences

and also possibly leads to poor perception of cognitive restructuring that enhance self esteem. Looking at the functional technicality involved in practicing cognitive restructuring, can counsellors subject themselves to the technique in practice as a process of enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

The family, religious organizations and society are worried and overwhelmed with the social and psychosocial problems with unavoidable consequences confronting the youths. These problems occur as a result of fading self esteem of secondary school students. The injury from self esteem is as result of isolation, mental ill health, depression and stigmatization. Undoubtedly, less self esteem among youths will make them less assertive, low self confident and unfocused in their daily drive to achieve success, hence, it will hamper sustainable national development.

However, low self esteem also leads our adolescents into sexual immorality, which deeply affects their mental health, value system and cause distractions on their academic activities. Counsellors face lots of challenges in the process of guiding and fortifying students so as to be equipped academically, emotionally and psychologically. But their efforts seem to be fruitless because government displays nonchalant attitude towards counselling practices. Non support of government to guidance and counselling practices is enough reason to hamper the practice of cognitive restructuring strategy among counsellors in Enugu state. Students leave secondary school with low self esteem because of complex challenges confronting counsellors in education system. Most students aspire to make it academically but this dream might become an illusion unless properly guided by counsellors who have a blurred perception of cognitive restructuring as a strategy for enhancing self esteem of secondary school students. It is against this background that this study was undertaken. The problem of this study is therefore, put in question form, "what are the perceptions of guidance counsellors on cognitive restructuring?

Research Question

The following research question guided the study

- (1) What are the perceptions of guidance counsellors on cognitive restructuring as a counselling strategy for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State?

Research Hypothesis

The following research hypothesis guided the study and was tested at .05 level of significance. Ho₁ there is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female guidance counsellors on the counselling strategies for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State.

Methods

Design

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey research design. According to Nwogu (2013), the thrust in the use of this design is that certain features or variables are merely described as they are at that particular time.

Area of the study

The study was carried out in all the six educational zones of Enugu State.

Population of the study

The population for this study comprised of 103 guidance and counsellors in all the 291 government public schools in Enugu State.

Sample and sampling techniques

The population of 103 guidance counsellors were used, because the number was manageable and, therefore, did not require any sampling technique.

Instrument for data collection

Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection in this study. This questionnaire which is developed by the researcher is titled Cognitive Restructuring for Enhancing Self Esteem Scale (CRS.FESES). The items listed on the (CRS.FESES) were placed on four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with assigned values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 point respectively.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was face validated by three experts, two of whom were in the field of guidance and counselling and one in measurement and evaluation of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. In order to ensure the reliability of the instrument trial testing was carried out using 25 guidance counsellors from Abia State owned Secondary Schools, (10 male and 15 female). Data collected were subjected to Cronbach Alpha Statistics in order to determine the internal consistency of the items which were not scored right or wrong (dichotomized) but rather were placed on a four point rating scales of SA, A, D and SD. The internal consistency of the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of .68.

Method of Data Collection

The instrument was administered directly to the respondents by the researcher using three research assistant. The research assistants were selected from three among six zonal coordinators of guidance services in the educational zones within the state. The choice of the three particular Zonal coordinators of guidance services in the state was informed by the fact that they have been working with the guidance counsellor. The research assistants were trained on how to administer and collect the questionnaires. 103 copies of CRS-FESES were distributed to the respondents but 94 were retrieved.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected by administering the research instrument were analysed based on the research question and hypothesis. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research question while t-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at .05 level of significance. A mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as agree while any mean score below 2.50 was regarded as disagree. The decision rule for the null hypothesis was that if t-calculated is equal or greater than t-critical at the chosen confidence level (.05) and degree of freedom ($n_1 + n_2 - 2$), the null hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected. If on the other hand, the calculated value is less than the value of t-critical from the table, then the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Result

Table 1: Mean Perception Scores ($\bar{x}$) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Guidance Counsellors on Cognitive Restructuring as a Counselling Strategy for Enhancing Self-Esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State. N = 96

S/N	Cognitive Restructuring as a strategy for Enhancing Self Esteem among Secondary School Students are based on:	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
		4	3	2	1			
1	Knowledge of the possibility of averting negative thought.	4	11	18	61	1.58	0.89	Disagree
2	Replacement of irrational thought with rational emotion	48	26	13	7	3.22	0.94	Agree
3	Believing in oneself	46	31	9	7	3.25	0.90	Agree
4	Changing your emotions and mindset	27	53	8	6	3.06	0.79	Agree
	Grand Mean					2.77		Agree

Results from table 1 showed that the respondents agreed on 3 out of the 4 items raised (28, 29 and 30) as guidance counsellors' perception of counseling strategies that are related to cognitive restructuring as appropriate for enhancing self-esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State. The respondents' mean scores for these items 3.22, 3.25 and 3.06 are above the cut off points. They were accepted as agree based on the decision that their mean ratings are more than the cut-off point of 2.50. The Table showed that the respondents disagreed with the remaining 1 item (13) with 1.58 as its mean score. Their standard deviation is small in all the items signifying that the respondents' responses are homogenous. The table also indicated a grand mean score of 2.77. Based on the guideline for the interpretation of the respondents' data, the answer to the research question is that Cognitive restructuring is a counseling strategy for enhancing self-esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female guidance counselors on cognitive restructuring for enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State.

Table 2: t-test Analysis of the Difference between the ($\bar{x}$) Mean Perception Score of Male and Female Guidance Counsellors on cognitive restructuring for Enhancing Self-Esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State.

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S ²	df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Female	53	2.97					NS
Counsellors			0.39	94	1.14	± 1.96	Do not reject H ₀
Male							
Counsellors	41	2.90					
Total	94	5.87					

Significant at $P < .05$, $df = 92$, critical t-value = ± 1.96

The t-test analysis in table 6 above indicates that the calculated t-value is 1.14 while the critical t-value is ± 1.96 at .05 level of significance. This implies that the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value. Thus, going by the decision rule, there is no significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female counselors on cognitive restructuring for enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State.

Discussion

With recourse to the above and as presented on table 1, the findings indicate that cognitive restructuring is a counselling strategy for enhancing self-esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State. The findings are consistent with Jaerz (2016) which asserts that an individual can reverse self-talk with positive thought while building healthy self-esteem. According to Jaerz, cognitive restructuring can be used to stop faulty automatic beliefs and can also help to dictate when someone is sad.

The first research hypothesis tried to ascertain if there is a significant difference in the mean perception scores of male and female guidance counsellors on the cognitive restructuring for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State. the analysis of the t-test comparison according to table 2 shows that the computed t (1.14) is less than the critical t-value (± 1.96) at .05 level of significance. With regard to the decision rule, research hypothesis 1 which held that there is a significant difference between the mean perception scores of male and female guidance counsellors on cognitive restructuring for enhancing self esteem among secondary school students in Enugu State is not rejected. This finding is at variance with Rodeavalt & Tragaleis (2003) who assert that females have a sense of self-esteem more than males.

Recommendations

On the basis of the implication and findings of this study, the researcher proffers the following recommendations.

- (1) Families should be sensitized on the best way and need for enhancing the self esteem of secondary school students as they are the major stake holders (beginning point of education) in achieving high self esteem.
- (2) Counsellors should provide psychosocial and educational assistance to the youths, hence, achieving a mental sane society, which will give rise to high self esteem of youths.
- (3) The Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB) should assist and advice para-counsellors to acquire university education in guidance and counselling for self improvement.
- (4) Ministry of education should help in introducing a mandatory type of orientation to students before they choose the subject concentration so that they get acquainted with different courses to offer, this will help them avert confusion on the process of choosing the right course that matches their interest, ability and personality.

Conclusion

The study addressed counsellor's perception of cognitive restructuring as a counselling strategy for enhancing self esteem among Secondary School Students in Enugu State. Whereas the imperative of self esteem among students was emphasized due to its multiplier effects in self realization and academic performance, the study also highlighted the challenges forced by students as a result of low self esteem.

The study went further to elucidate essentiality of the cognitive restructuring mechanism and its therapeutic relevance in helping to re-engineer and enhance self-esteem among Secondary School Students. However, the study identified a number of challenges hindering effective practice and realization of the potentials of cognitive restructuring strategy.

It thus behooves on the government and other relevant stakeholders to up their game in showing more commitment and providing enabling environment for this strategy to be utilized for the purpose of enhancing self esteem among Students especially in Secondary Schools in Enugu State.

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