



Effects of Group Counseling on Changing Negative Attitudes of Students with Special Needs

UMAR, U.S.

**Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria
maruus1959@gmail.com**

ABSTRACT

The study employed the experimental design to investigate the “Effects of Group Counseling on Changing Negative Attitudes of Students with Special Needs”. The main research question was: what is the effect of group counseling of students with special needs? The population of the study was all public secondary schools in the Northern Senatorial District of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Seventy (70) students with special needs drawn from the schools formed the sample size. Pre-and post-counseling attitudes were used to collect data. Mean and standard deviation were used to test the research questions while t-test was employed to test the hypothesis. The finding showed significant effect of group counselling on negative attitude of students with special needs. It was recommended that counsellors should apply different therapeutic methods for students with special needs. The students should also be encouraged to disabuse their negative attitudes.

Keywords: Attitude, group counseling and special needs.

INTRODUCTION

Group counselling or group therapy is a group activity in which the primary purpose is to assist individuals in the group with similar problems. This helps them realize that they are not alone with the problems (Cherry, 2017). A counsellor will have responded to them as individuals in face-to-face interviews. During individual counseling, it will have become apparent to the counsellor that a group situation might well prove more helpful to such students. This will then be explored with the students and after careful reparations, the counsellor would move into group counseling. Group counseling is therefore, not to be seen as an economy of effort nor as a way to supplement individual counseling (Chalraburty, 2017). Rather, it should be regarded as a counselling process which is particularly appropriate for students who have already experienced individual counselling (Sohrabi, Mohammadi & Aghdam, 2013).

Group counselling challenges are usually associated with difficulties in social behaviour and the expression of feeling. Problems of value confusion and purposelessness can also be usefully explored in a group counselling. Studies have revealed that some students respond better in a group of peers than in an individual counselling relationship (William, 2016; Barnes, 2017). Group counselling thus, enables counsellors to establish contacts with students who may need a different kind of help from that available in individual counselling therapy.

According to Tomasulo (2010), group counselling frequently leads to individual counseling where group members who have started the process of self-exploration may desire opportunities to go further in individual counselling.

Group counselling is most effective when students in the group are of the same age bracket and of similar gender (Martins, 2016). In such situations, male students, for instance, will always feel free to discuss

their feelings especially when they are in the midst of their male fellows. The same applies to female students (Martins, 2016).

Psychological Effects of Students with Special Needs in Nigeria

The feeling of trauma appears vivid in students with special needs (Mevissen & Jongth, 2018). This trauma could be either social or psychological. The victims are usually occupied with thoughts of anger, fear of death, guilt of having to pass it on to others, thoughts of how to fit into the society or cope with work stress (Wigham, Hatta and Taylor, 2011).

Students with special needs are individuals with mental, emotional or physical disability (Eskay and Uma, 2012). Such students will need help with communication, self-care, mobility and decision making. They therefore, require special care. To ensure their safety, laws have been enacted by the Federal Government of Nigeria (Asiwe & Omiegba, 2015; Omede, 2016). The continuous negative perceptions of students with disabilities have made accountability difficult to achieve, especially when funds meant to cater for their responsibilities by Federal, State and Local authorities are misappropriated (Omede, 2016). The misrepresentations of cultural beliefs about people with disabilities and their alleged maltreatment by society cannot be allowed down the drain without being challenged. The immediate impact of these negative societal perceptions is that teacher training and certification in special education are not maintained.

Ignorance, superstition and societal taboos have caused the lack of care of students with disabilities. Barriya, Buchana, Cerimovic and Sharma (2017) found that cultural behaviours resulting from superstition and negative perception of students have led to poor identification, evaluation, placement and instruction in schools. Similarly, the absence of legal mandate indicates that parents of disabled students lack the legal rights to due process, and as a result, they cannot initiate litigation against any form of discrimination against their children in terms of admissions into schools, manpower placement and service delivery (Barriga, Buchanan, Cerimovic, & Sharma, 2017). This calls for concerted efforts by governments and individuals to address the phenomenon in favour of the students with special needs.

Types of Students with Special Needs

Graham, (2017) has identified 4 general types of special needs students, viz: physical, developmental, behavioural/emotional and sensory impaired. He further identified special needs students who often have mild learning disabilities or profound developmental problems. He concluded that most common disabilities found amongst students fall under developmental concerns, which. This explains a vast umbrella of itself requiring that every students and every case are treated individually. There are also students who perform at high capacities no matter what their disabilities and those with very low capacities to perform in the school setting. It is to be noted that not all disabled students need special classes, just as not all of them are capable of completing such unavailability of special services (Heimaan, 2017). This is where individual treatment becomes imperative. Thus, remedial classes may be all that is required for some students with disabilities (Partanen, 2016).

Within the school system, students with physical handicap need adequate building codes to accommodate their disabilities. In many of these cases the students are able to perform their work normally. After all, when all necessary provisions are met, most students can reach their optimum educational goal (Gous, Elott and Moen, 2014).

Given that schools receive students with various disabilities, implies that they need age appropriate services or assistance in order to cope effectively with their studies. Once these services are put in place, they perform to their optima. Encouragement from parents, teachers and counsellors are, thus imperative in this regard. Students with disabilities therefore, need more patience and understanding than the normal ones (Eskay, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The statement under study was to investigate Effects of group counselling on changing negative attitudes of students with special needs.

Research Question

The study was guided by the research question:

What is the effect of group counseling on the negative attitudes of students with special needs?

Hypothesis

The study tested the following hypothesis:

Ho: There is no significant effect of group counseling on negative attitude of students with special needs.

METHODOLOGY

Population

This study covered all public secondary schools in the Northern Senatorial District of Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling

The study utilized a sample of seventy (70) students drawn from the public secondary schools in the Senatorial District through multistage sampling. The sample size drawn after clustered and random sampling procedures were used by the researcher to separate 35 male students and 35 female students from the selected schools. Purposive and accidental sampling techniques were used to select the students with special needs.

Instrumentation

Pre-counseling was applied to check the negative attitude of students before experiment and post-counseling was used to check the negative attitude of the students after experiment.

RESULTS

Table 1: Pre-counseling attitude scores of experimental and control groups

Groups	N	Mean	Variance	SD	t-calculated	t-critical
Experimental	35	17.7327	11.5437	4.1711		
Control	35	17.7314	11.5717	4.1216	2.000	-0.1700

From Table 1, the t-value for significant difference between experimental and control groups was calculated and $t = 2.000$, while t-critical was $t = -0.1700$ at $\alpha = 0.05$. Since $t\text{-calculated} > t\text{-critical}$, t-test falls in the acceptance region implying that both groups were equivalent before starting the experiment.

Table 2: Post-counseling attitude scores of experimental and control groups

Groups	N	Variance	SD	t-calculated	t-critical
Experimental	35	19.7	3	2.000	
Control	35	16.7	5.6117		-5.4379

From Table 2, post-counseling $t\text{-calculated} = 2.000$ while $t\text{-critical} = 5.4379$ at $\alpha = 0.05$. Since $t\text{-calculated} < t\text{-critical}$, H_0 was rejected. Hence, there was significant effect of group counseling on negative attitude of students with special needs.

DISCUSSIONS

The present study explored the effects of group counseling on changing negative attitudes of students with special abilities. It compared the scores of both the experimental and control groups. The findings rejected the null hypothesis that a combination of group and individual counseling can change the negative attitudes of students with special abilities. It can thus, be concluded that the effect of group counseling was observed regardless of the students' previous contact experiences.

The study further showed that it is possible to change the negative attitudes of students with special needs in a group counseling setting thereby, suggesting that this can be achieved by group counseling that energizes students with special needs. It also showed that students' attitude can be changed through group counseling with members of the contact group, provided the group is cooperative and on an equal status level, which were clearly met by the current study. The findings also confirmed that group counselling relationship were interdependent and the students' emotional and the counsellor's professional needs had been met in order to generate a positive interactive situation for effective results. Studies (Rozario, 2014; Georgiana, 2014) have shown that counselors make specific statements of praise to students with special needs who had been cooperative. Therefore, it is clear from the findings of this study that group counseling makes students to appreciate the process and change their negative attitudes.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that group counseling is an effective intersection for students with special needs. When experiences are shared among group members, it helps them to cope with their emotional responses. It also helps them in their rehabilitation as they help one another to become proactive rather than reactionary and feeling negative about their situations. Early identification of students with special needs through group counselling should not only be encouraged and practiced, but should be in place to assist them survive their predicaments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Counsellors should apply different therapeutic strategies for different students with different levels of special needs;
- ii. For students who exhibit learning disabilities, their teachers and parents should encourage and emphasize on their abilities and talents as opposed to focusing solely on their deficiencies (Georgiana 2014; Kourkoout & Giovazolias, 2015).
- iii. Parents can help counsellors with relevant information on the future needs and preferences of their children so as to disabuse the students' negative attitudes. Such information can help the students and parents in identifying their negative attitudes so that appropriate remedies can be applied to provide succor for them;
- iv. The effect of group counselling can also be achieved by rehabilitating the students with special needs through restoring their maximum usefulness.
- v. They can also be motivated to achieve their maximum capacity by directing them to overcome the disabling conditions involved with disabilities. This can also inject new lives into them;
- v. The students with special needs should be encouraged not to reflect on their past mistakes; not to consider themselves as not useful. They should be encouraged to discuss ways of living happy during group counselling sessions.
- vi. The students should be made to realize the positive attitudes that give them positive lives, given that negative ones will affect their lives negatively.

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