

The Effectiveness of Psycho-Educational Group Counselling for Normal Students and Students with Special Needs in Terms of Career Awareness and Self-Concept

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Abstract: The objective of this quasi-experimental research was to investigate the effectiveness of psycho-educational group counseling on career awareness and self-concept among normal students and students with special needs. This research also studied the relationship between career awareness and self-concept among students. A total of 40 students comprising of both normal students (n = 21) and students with special needs (n = 19) were randomly selected as subjects for this study. These subjects were divided into 4 groups separating normal students from students with special needs. About 11 normal students and 10 students with special needs formed the 2 treatment groups that were provided with the psycho-educational group counseling while 10 normal students and 9 students with special needs formed the 2 control groups that did not receive the psycho educational group counseling. The data from this study was analysed using the t-test, one way ANOVA and Pearson correlation test at 0.05 significant level. The results from this study showed that the psycho-educational group counseling is able to increase the level of career awareness and self-concept among the subjects. The findings from this research showed that psycho-educational group counseling is an effective method of increasing career awareness and self-concept among normal students and students with special needs in the secondary level.

Key words: Psycho-educational group counseling, career awareness, self concept, special needs students, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Initially the psycho-educational group counselling was developed to be used in education, specifically in the public school system. The psycho-educational group counselling has been proven to be useful to develop self-concept and behaviour among school students. The psycho-educational group counselling is designed with activities and exercises, planned and structured as such to facilitate an increase of self-value among participants. The psycho-educational group is also known as guidance group (Villalba, 2003). There are many types of psycho-educational groups and one of them is specifically focused on career development. Psycho-educational is a counselling treatment that is not only based on knowledge that is given in the processes involved but also the perception given leading to change in results.

Psycho-educational group counselling stresses on an education method to provide information for the development of relevant skills and knowledge (Brown, 2003). Therefore, psycho-educational group can

be used at any level and with any type of client. Through the psycho-educational group therapy, clients can be cured based on their purpose and concentration, as the treatment given depends on their development. Thus, psycho-educational group is commonly used in many institutes apart from schools, such as hospitals, mental health agencies, defence institutes, social service agencies and universities. These counselling sessions include discussion groups, interaction based groups, recovery groups, support groups, orientation groups, education groups or student-centered learning groups (Rivera *et al.*, 2004). The main objective in psycho-educational groups is to strengthen problem-facing skills and enhance self-appreciation while trying to avoid creating failure or weakness of a possible future self-development.

Year in and out, many students with special needs quit schooling and venture into adult-hood without acquiring proper working skills and end-up inadvertently facing difficulties coping with life. According to Eliason and Patrick (2008) generally, career development among students with special needs are limited and they are

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usually faced with problems such as limited salary, limited career skills, lack of jobs or no jobs at all. Apart from that, students with special needs quit schooling without acquiring the necessary skills and are thus not able to be independent.

The presence and role of a counsellor is not taken into consideration in the transition programme that is implemented by the Malaysian special education system. Counselling services and lessons are an important aspect in early preparation for the transition of a student with special needs into the working environment. The counsellor plays an important role in helping students achieve meaningful growth in their careers.

One of the objectives of secondary school education in Malaysia is to prepare the youths to be independent adults. This includes imparting the skills necessary to obtain job to gain opportunities for a university education to be able to partake in society, to be able to live independently and to be able to participate in social recreational activities. Most young people are generally able to successfully move on to a new phase of life without much difficulties. This however, may not be the case among students with disability or special needs. The sad reality remains that majority of people with special needs or disability are still unable to fully participate in the general idea of adulthood as the working world or rather scoring a job opportunity is one of the most important path in an individuals life and society still debates the working ability of the someone with special needs.

Roessler *et al.* (2007) in their research stated that career counselling services are more effective if offered in the early secondary school level, before these students with special needs continue their studies in a college or university. In another research, Holland (1985) says that the lack of career exposure at the beginning stage of a child's development is one of the reasons connected to the many problems faced related to careers such as an unclear vocational identity, a weak polar personality and enrolling into a career that does not suit a person's interest and personality. Psycho-educational career counselling services is an important component as an early preparation even for normal students as they venture into the working environment. Career exposure at an early development stage is important to help students achieve the desired career niche as this would indirectly enhance the growth and development of their career.

Students with special needs generally struggle with negative self-concept and low self-appreciation skills as they lack potential in carrying out many a task. Sometimes however it is not their physical or mental impairment that contributes to their low self-concept but stereotypical

societal behaviour towards students or people with special needs. Exposure to these prejudicial treatments by those around gives a negative impact towards their self-evaluation (Rohany, 2003).

Study by Rinn *et al.* (2010) suggests that teenagers should be given interventions such as counselling, special activities and appropriate accommodation in order to prevent deterioration of self-concept that could occur. There is no denial that people with special needs are those who are identified with disabilities in hearing, vision or learning problems as stated by Pendidikan (1997). However, those with special needs are part of the community and they have a role in the national development. Therefore, people with special needs should be given opportunities to develop the country and not to be a burden to the society. They should be entitled to fair treatment without discrimination on the basis of their disability.

Based on the lack of career exposure on career development at an early stage which causes lower level of awareness and lower level of self esteem among the special needs a form of aid is needed to help them. It helps special individuals to raise awareness within them, especially about their personalities, interests, personal values and capabilities as well as identify appropriate career interests and abilities. Furthermore, self-awareness will ensure that an individual can make the right and suitable choice eventually to attain satisfaction in career. Psycho-educational group counselling services proposes in this study to focus on aspects of career awareness and to ensure that career development process among students with special needs excelled.

The objective of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of psycho-educational group counselling on career and self awareness among the special needs and normal students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted using the pre-and post-test design which was to increase the level of career and self awareness among secondary school students. This research is a comparison between the normal student and the special students. The independent variable in this research was the psycho-educational group counselling while the responding variable is the level of career awareness and self awareness. About 40 students which consisted of the special need students (n = 19) and normal student (n = 21) from an international school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was randomly selected as research sample. The researches subsequently formed 4 groups in which the 2 experimental groups provided by

the psycho-educational counselling consisted of 11 normal students and 10 special need students and two other control groups which was not provided by the psycho-educational group counselling program consisted of 10 normal students and 9 special need students. They were known as experimental and control groups. They were between the ages of 11-13.

A total of 10% from the international school had different types of disabilities, such as learning delay, down syndrom, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity (ADHA). The reading level among the students were to determined using the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA II) which was created by Neale (1999). This test method was used to see the reading level among students between 6-13 years old. The reading level test among the special need students was conducted by the school psychologist each year. The researcher as a school psychologist obtained the reading level score from the NARA II. The impact on career awareness was measured by using the career awareness inventory (Fadale, 1974) which comprised of seven subscales known as the identity, training, models, function, prestige, clusters and characteristics while the self-awareness changed were measured using the Piers-Harris self-concept scale (Piers *et al.*, 1969) which was made up of six subscales that included behavioural adjustment, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, freedom from anxiety, popularity and happiness and satisfaction.

The experimental group had to undergo the psycho-educational group counselling for 6 session on the contrary the control group was the waiting group. The psycho-educational group counselling was provided only after the data relating to the experimental group had been collected. The researcher met all the 40 subjects and provided explanation that they were participating in a research and were required to take a few test, such as the career awareness test and self awareness test. The participation in the counselling session was considered as their attendance for their daily classes. Each session took at least one and half hours. The researcher met the subject once a week for a duration of 6 weeks consequently. The control group was given instruction on not to participate the counselling session till the session for the experimental group finishes. The researcher conducted counselling session with the control group on the 6th week after the experimental group completed. Once all the experimental group subject had completed the psycho-educational group counselling session, all of the research subject were given the post test for career awareness inventory and self awareness scale. After that, the researcher started to conduct the counselling session with the control group just as what was conducted for the treatment group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experimental effects on career awareness: Data obtained from the pre- and post-test was analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to measure the effectiveness of the experiment towards the experimental group and the control group for the dependent variables career awareness and self concept. Table 1 shows that counselling provides a significant effect for the treatment group ($F = 10.79, k < 0.05$). This means that psycho-educational counselling treatment provides a significant impact on the career awareness scores. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis which states that there is significant effect on the treatment between the treatment group and the control group in the pre- and post-test survey of career awareness score is accepted.

Experimental effects on self concept: Table 2 shows that counselling treatment provides a significant effect to the experimental group ($F = 3.34, k < 0.05$). This means that the psycho-educational counselling treatment factor gives a significant impact on the self awareness score. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis that there are significant treatment effects between the experimental group and the control group in pre- and post-test of self concept is accepted.

The F-value for both the treatment groups were significant for career awareness and this indicates that the psycho-educational counselling treatment is effective. The results for the main hypothesis suggest that psycho-educational counselling which was done to increase the career awareness showed immersed effectiveness. Next, the results shows that there is a enormous effect on the group counselling treatment towards identity, training, models, functions, prestige and character of the respective groups of students. The purpose of the study which provide career awareness to normal students and special need students in the early stages of secondary school is appropriate to what the Rivera and Schaefer (2009) stated that career awareness should be the focus because awareness is the starting

Table 1: Differences in treatment factor and group for the career awareness variable using ANOVA

Variation sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value
Between groups	5006.30	7	715.18	10.79*
Within groups	4782.88	72	66.42	
Total	9789.18	79		

Table 2: Difference in the treatment factor effect and group for the self concept variable using ANOVA

Variation sources	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value
Between groups	1669.75	7	238.53	3.34*
Within groups	5142.19	72	71.41	
Total	6811.95	79		

* $k < 0.05$

point in the career development program. McMahon and Watson (2005) also stated that the information required by the child in a career is related to the implications of a lifetime career, job career and life, career management and the importance and properties of personal and character in terms of career. Career information listed by McMohan and Watson (2005) is being used as a counselling session discussion of the study. The study states that the group psycho-educational counselling treatment is effective to enhance career awareness. This study which provides treatment to those students with special needs supports the study by Dipeolu (2011) which states that although the research literature is full of information on guidance for career counselling service for students with special needs but research exists to help career counselors who work with students with special needs (ADHD) is very small, therefore researcher suggested that planned effective group counselling treatment for career should be provided to help students with special needs in the process of their career development. This study is also consistent with the study of Carter *et al.* (2009) which stress that career counselling is one important factor to help students with special needs in the process of career advancement.

The result on this study shows that psycho-educational group counselling is effective in raising awareness to this career which is consistent with studies Masdonati *et al.* (2009) who states in his research that psycho-educational group counselling is effective against career consideration, a broader understanding on career understanding development of life indicators. This study also supports other studies which uses similar counselling treatment such as study by Shurts and Shoffner (2004) who reported in their study that the career group counselling promotes opportunities in the development of career interests, skills, beliefs, values and personal quality. Advancements like this can help to deal with issues like identity foreclosure and social isolation to create a set of problem solving and decision-making skills that will serve the students throughout their life study by Whiston (2002) states that structured group career counselling is the most effective counselling treatment in providing professional services to clients and Fidan *et al.* (2009) in their study group reported that career counselling can improve personal career identity, professional values, self-awareness, improve understanding of the importance of career information resources among the students.

In addition to the measures of career awareness, this study also measures whether the treatment is done to improve self-concept as measured by the scale Piers-Harris self-concept. Results of both treatment group and normal group of students with special needs showed improvement in self-concept significantly.

Counselling sessions has channelled knowledge such as self-management for lifelong learning which aims to create awareness in the process of forming the target on self-knowledge and self-acceptance which again provides knowledge on the importance of positive self-concept, self-management. It helps to develop awareness on personal safety skills, problem solving and decision-making which creates to provide awareness on how to solve problems and make decisions and interpersonal and communication skills. Knowledge learned together with new behavioural skills which effectively makes the group members understand the importance of positive self-concept, identify and appreciate the personal characteristics of each as shown in the immersed results of the study. The purpose of the study focused on the development of self-concept is consistent with studies by Medina (2006) which states that the self concept lesson is important in communication skills because others perception and self plays an important role in interpersonal communication. By asking students to reflect and state clearly as individuals and future professionals, provides a basis for making improvements in their ability to communicate with others. Increased ability to communicate is important for students who are prepared to enter professional practice that requires interpersonal communication skills.

In general, it can be said after undergoing group psycho-educational counselling, subjects became more confident to stand up and experiencing the rise in self-awareness. Results of the study is in accordance with what was stated in the findings of research studies conducted by Elbaum and Vaughn (2003) which showed that students who have low self-esteem benefited significantly by the treatment given. Next, the study of Saunders *et al.* (2000) also reported that a significant increase in self-concept after the psycho-educational group counselling treatment was provided and results of the study showed that there were significant differences in improvement between the experimental and control groups among the disabled. This study also supports studies that provides counselling treatment group incurs almost the same as the study, Asci and Akkok (2007) which reported that group counselling is far more effective to enhance students self-concept than individual counselling, fitness training or control conditions results of the statistical analysis of the research data Egbochuku and Aihie (2009) which states that the group counselling had a major positive impact on self-concept and study by Rossello and Jimenez-Chafey (2006) which featured in their study that students self-concept improved significantly after cognitive behaviour group counselling treatment was given.

CONCLUSION

The results shows that the psycho-educational group counselling successfully raise career awareness and self-concept on normal and special need students after participating in six psycho-educational group counselling. Overall, normal and special need students can increase the career awareness and self-concept significantly when compared with subjects who are waiting to receive counselling. This shows that the effectiveness of psycho-educational group counselling can be used effectively focusing on career awareness and self-concept.

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