

A Study of Adjustment Problems in Connection with Guidance Programs of Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT: In secondary school, adjustment involves responding to academic, emotional, social and family demands. Students with such difficulties may need structured educational and psychosocial support. In this conceptual paper, adjustment problems are discussed in relation to school guidance programs based on ecological systems theory, social cognitive theory, person-centered counselling and the stage-environment fit perspective. Four major dimensions of adjustment are identified and educational, personal-emotional, social and career guidance are discussed as complementary forms of support. A framework is proposed which integrates the identification of adjustment difficulties, guidance-needs assessment, appropriate guidance activities, skills development and follow-up evaluation. The framework recognizes that family support, school climate, program quality and initial student needs may affect outcomes. Implications for counsellors, teachers, parents and educational administrators are discussed and propositions for future empirical testing are identified. This is a conceptual study; no primary data or statistical findings are presented.

KEYWORDS: Adjustment problems; adolescent development; educational counselling; guidance programs; secondary school students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adjustment is best viewed as an ongoing interplay between students and their learning environments. The transition to secondary school may involve new teaching methods, more difficult exams and changing peer groups. Concurrently, adolescents are developing autonomy and exploring personal identities (Erikson, 1968). These overlapping changes make school-based support particularly relevant but students' experiences vary according to their resources, relationships and opportunities. The conceptual approach is appropriate as guidance programs have a number of activities and adjustment is multidimensional. Instead of assuming that participation always improves outcomes, this paper identifies plausible mechanisms and contextual conditions. It separates the need for support from the support provided and from the final outcomes, offering a framework that can then be tested by empirical research. Secondary school is a time of major academic and developmental change. Students negotiate examination requirements, peer relationships, increasing independence and expectations of future education. Their adjustment is a function of the interaction of individual resources for coping and the opportunities and pressures that exist in schools, families and communities. When demands and available support do not match, students may experience academic disengagement, interpersonal conflict or emotional difficulties. A comprehensive school guidance program offers preventive, developmental and responsive support rather than occasional counselling. This paper provides a conceptual rationale for how identification of adjustment difficulties can guide the selection of educational, personal-emotional, social, and career-related services. It does not assert that participation in guidance will automatically result in better adjustment; that proposition must be empirically validated.

II. OBJECTIVES

- ✚ To find out the meaning and dimensions of adjustment of secondary school students.
- ✚ To determine common adjustment difficulties and associated guidance needs.
- ✚ Discuss psychological theories relevant to school counselling and student adjustment.
- ✚ To propose a framework linking needs identification, guidance activities, and adjustment outcomes.
- ✚ To consider implications for school practice and future empirical research.

III. ADJUSTMENT CONCEPT AND DIMENSION

Educational adjustment includes participation in lessons, exams and study routines; emotional adjustment includes identifying and managing feelings; social adjustment includes belonging, communication and relationships with peers; and home adjustment includes the fit between family circumstances and students' developmental needs. These dimensions are interrelated. For example, family stress can interfere with study habits, and social exclusion can diminish a sense of belonging in school.

Thus an evaluation limited to school achievement may overlook important sources of difficulty. Adjustment is not to be confused with a blind conformity to school expectations. Expecting a student to change alone, and not the teaching practices, protection from bullying or reasonable accommodations, is not realistic. Thus, the ecological perspective calls for the assessment of both individual coping resources and environmental barriers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Adjustment is a continuous process in which individuals deal with personal needs and environmental demands. Successful adjustment is not the absence of challenges, but the development of appropriate strategies and access to support. Adjustment in secondary education is often viewed in educational, emotional, social and home contexts.

IV. SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS

✚ Educational accommodations An effective component of educational guidance can include study planning, workshops on learning strategies and early referral for additional academic support. Teachers and counsellors should work together to identify barriers, using low marks as evidence of poor motivation. Periodic review of attendance, participation and students' own accounts can help decide whether support is appropriate. There can be difficulties for students who do not have the learning strategies or resources to meet the academic expectations, curriculum requirements and examinations. Educational guidance can help in goal setting, study planning, exam preparation and appropriate academic referrals.

❖ **Emotion adaptation** : The personal guidance may include age-appropriate activities on emotional literacy, problem-solving and help-seeking. Students' appraisal of demands and available resources in the setting of the Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress-and-coping framework may affect their responses. While guidance can bolster coping resources, ongoing or serious issues should be evaluated and, where appropriate, referred to qualified professionals. Adolescents may experience stress, uncertainty, and difficulty with emotion regulation. Trained counsellors can create a respectful environment for students to explore concerns and develop coping methods and can refer students to specialized services as needed.

❖ **Social adaptation** : Belonging relates to both learning and well-being. Wentzel (1998) investigated the relations of school motivation with parents, teachers and peers. Thus, a guidance program can include peer-support activities and clear procedures for dealing with bullying, as well as the involvement of teachers. Individual counselling should not be used as a substitute for action to address unsafe or exclusionary school practices. Peer acceptance, communication and classroom belonging affect the experience of school. Peer conflict, bullying and isolation can undermine participation social guidance could include training in communication, conflict resolution, peer-support activities, and inclusive school practices.

❖ **Adjustment at home** :Family involvement should be positive and not punitive. Parent meetings, communication workshops, and coordinated follow-up can help align expectations between home and school. What information is shared with caregivers is something counsellors need to consider in terms of student privacy versus safety. School experiences for students are influenced by family relationships, expectations, and access to support. When confidentiality and safeguarding needs are met, counsellors and teachers can collaborate with parents or caregivers to coordinate support. School Guidance Programs The detailed guidance includes universal activities for all students, targeted support for students with emerging needs and individualized responses for students experiencing more significant difficulties. An example of an organized framework for planning, delivering and evaluating school counselling services is the ASCA national model (American School Counsellor Association, 2019). Its principles have to be adapted to the local staffing, cultural expectations and resources available. The quality of the program depends on accessibility, trained staff, referral pathways and regular evaluation. Stigma, limited awareness of available support, or lack of confidence in confidentiality, can prevent students from seeking services. Schools therefore need to be explicit about how to access help and provide multiple appropriate points of entry, including student self-referral and teacher referral. School Guidance Program A system of services planned to support the educational, personal, social and career development of students. Academic decision making and learning strategies are included in educational guidance. Personal-emotional guidance Assists in self-understanding and coping. Social guidance helps children develop interpersonal skills and positive peer relationships. Career guidance is a process that helps people explore their interests, education paths and future options. The functions are overlapping and should be coordinated.

V. SCHOOL GUIDANCE PROGRAMS

Comprehensive guidance includes universal activities for all students, targeted support for students with emerging needs and individualized responses where difficulties are more significant. An example of an organized framework for planning, delivering and evaluating school counselling services is the ASCA national model (American School Counsellor Association, 2019). Its principles have to be adapted to the local staffing, cultural expectations and resources available. The quality of the program depends on accessibility, trained staff, referral pathways and regular evaluation. Stigma, limited awareness of available support, or lack of confidence in confidentiality, can prevent students from seeking services. Schools therefore need to be explicit about how to access help and provide multiple appropriate points of entry, including student self-referral and teacher referral. School Guidance Program A system of services planned to support the educational, personal, social and career development of students. Academic decision making and learning strategies are included in educational guidance. Personal-emotional guidance Assists in self-understanding and coping. Social guidance helps children develop interpersonal skills and positive peer relationships. Career guidance is a process which helps people explore their interests, education paths and future options. These functions overlap and need to be orchestrated.

VI. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

- ❖ **Ecological systems theory** Bronfenbrenner (1979) contextualizes and interacts environmental systems. How students adjust can be influenced by relationships with family, school, peers, and the community. Therefore, guidance should go beyond co-operation in individual counselling.
- ❖ **Social cognitive theory** : Bandura (1986) describes reciprocal interactions between personal factors, behaviour and environment. Guidance activities that provide achievable goals, feedback and supported practice can enhance students' self-efficacy and adaptive behaviour.
- ❖ **Counselling**: Person-centered Empathy, genuineness and acceptance are important in helping relationships according to Rogers (1951). These principles are relevant for establishing confidence and for helping students explore emotional and interpersonal issues.
- ❖ **The correspondence between stage and environment** : Eccles et al. (1993) argue that adolescents' experiences are linked to developmental needs and the fit of school environments. Guidance programs should take autonomy, belonging and opportunities to develop competence into account.

VII. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The model starts by identifying difficulties in the educational, emotional, social and home domains. Assessment drives selection of guidance activities that can promote academic planning, emotional regulation, interpersonal competence, and sound decision-making. Then the follow-up assessment examines whether the student's experience has improved and if further environmental changes or referrals to specialists are needed. This procedure is not a one-off process but an iterative one. The framework is about hypothesized relationships, not causal findings. Family support, school climate, access to services and quality of program delivery may moderate the pathway from guidance to adjustment.

VIII. CONCEPTUAL PROPOSITIONS.

- ✚ Students with more adjustment difficulties may need more guidance.
- ✚ Participation in appropriate guidance may be associated with improved adjustment over time.
- ✚ Guidance, adjustment, self-efficacy and interpersonal skills may be associated through coping skills.
- ✚ School climate, family support and program quality may impact on guidance outcomes.

IX. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE IN SCHOOL

Implementation can begin with a needs assessment that includes students, teachers and caregivers. Schools can then program an annual program of classroom guidance, small group activities and individual counselling and referral arrangements. Clear responsibilities must be allocated for program delivery, safeguarding, records management and review. Evaluation should include student feedback as well as indicators such as attendance, belonging, and perceived access to support. Schools can implement systematic, non-stigmatising needs assessments, provide accessible counselling services and conduct regular program evaluations. Counsellors can offer individual or group support, teachers can spot any academic or social issues that are beginning to emerge and parents can offer ongoing support at home. Confidentiality, informed participation, culturally responsive practice, and referral pathways are essential.

X. DISCUSSION

Adjustment is not reduced to an individual deficit in a joint interpretation. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on home-school links, Bandura's (1997) work on beliefs in ability and Rogers' (1951) model on a respectful counselling relationship all inform the focus. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that useful programs should focus on skills, relationships and conditions in school. The framework should serve as a guide for research, but not to establish a causal effect based on conceptual reasoning alone. There are also restrictions. Guidance services differ widely from school to school and the meaning of successful adjustment may differ in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Self-report measures are subject to social desirability bias. Referral patterns may bias program groups toward students with greater needs. Carefully designed longitudinal intervention research could help address these challenges, and test which components are most relevant for particular students. The theories discussed here provide complementary explanations for the proposed framework. Ecological systems theory emphasizes relationships with the environment; social cognitive theory emphasizes skills and self-efficacy; person-centered counselling informs supportive interactions; and stage-environment fit draws attention to school conditions. Together they identify guidance as the most plausible school-wide coordinated process rather than a stand-alone intervention. However, the degree to which any component improves adjustment will vary and must be tested in specific settings.

XI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Schools should prioritize trained guidance personnel, confidential and accessible support, family-school collaboration and routine program evaluation. Future research should assess changes in adjustment before and after program participation, while controlling for initial need, school context, and the type and intensity of services provided. Qualitative interviews could add to quantitative findings by documenting students' experiences of accessing support. Adjustment difficulties among secondary school students are evident in educational, emotional, social and home domains. An integrated guidance program may help schools to identify needs and provide appropriate support in a developmentally sensitive way. Schools must coordinate counsellors, teachers, and families; ensure access to appropriate services; and evaluate student outcomes, without assuming that participation alone establishes effectiveness. Future research should employ longitudinal or controlled designs, investigate quality of programs, and explore rural-urban and socioeconomic differences.

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