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Influence of Social Skills on Behavioural Adjustments among University Students in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the influence of social skills on behavioural adjustments among university students in Uasin Gishu County. The study was anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). A mixed-methods approach and a phenomenological design were employed in the research. The target population comprised of 85,000 students and 10 counselors drawn from six universities in Uasin Gishu County. Simple random sampling was used to draw a sample of 323 students while purposive sampling was used to select four counselors and three universities. This study used questionnaires and in-depth interviews guide to collect data. Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed through themes derived from the research questions. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 and presented into frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations. To test the hypotheses, the researcher used ANOVA to determine whether there is a relationship that exists between the variables. From the findings it was social skills ($F(25,173) = 5.573, p=0.00$) significantly influenced behavioural adjustments of students. The findings of the study may be useful to the community, institutions of higher learning and the society. The study recommended that there was need for dedicated efforts aimed at assessing the types of psychological counseling interventions available, their accessibility, and the level of awareness among students in Uasin Gishu County universities.

Keywords: Social Skills; Behavioral Adjustments; Psychological Counseling Interventions; University Students; Phenomenological Design

1. Introduction

Social skills treatments include a broad range of competencies that enable individuals to engage and communicate effectively with others. Social skills are learnable actions that are seen as signs of social proficiency (Bala & Monika, 2022). Social skills are a set of learned behaviours which gives the individual, the ability to exercise an influential relationship with other members of the society and abstain from reactions that are considered unreasonable in a society (Rahman et al., 2023). We learn how to solve social situations by predicting and understanding other people's behaviours (Soto-Icaza et al., 2015). Appropriate social skills provide the individual with an important foundation that leads to good social relationships with peers and academic success. Scholars have argued that inappropriate social skills during childhood are associated with a number of negative consequences in the development of paradigms of social behaviour, such as aggressive behaviour, social withdrawal, extreme shyness, problems with social, emotional, and behavioural adaptation, and social inefficiency. Therefore, there is a need to learn social skills, among the most important elements of which are self-assertion skills, emotional skills and communication skills (e.g. transmission skills, introduction skills, control skills, social and emotional flexibility (Abu Sabah et al., 2022). The social skills that were investigated in this study included communication, conflict resolution, managing relationships, problem solving and assertiveness.

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Behavioural adjustment refers to changes in behaviour in response to internal or external stimuli, aiming to cope with new or changing conditions. This concept is broadly applicable in psychology, education, and social science, as it encompasses how individuals adapt their behaviour based on experiences, social context, or environmental demands. Behavioural adjustment among university students encompasses a range of factors influenced by current societal and technological changes. Contemporary issues such as digital learning environments, mental health awareness, and increased diversity in student populations play significant roles in how students adapt (Wang, 2022). The behavioural adjustments among university students was measured by noting marked improvements in areas such as self-control, empathy, and cooperation, largely attributed to the implementation of cooperative learning strategies. Such methodologies in educational settings are vital, as they foster the development of interpersonal skills, social competencies, and teamwork capabilities key factors in the professional and social triumphs of students (Mendo-Lazaro et al., 2018).

The entrance to the university marks a period of transition for young people. Through this transition, students face new challenges, such as making independent decisions about their lives and studies, adjusting to the academic demands of an ill-structured learning environment, and interacting with a diverse range of new people. In addition, many students must, often for the first time, leave their homes and distance themselves from their support networks (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). The extent to which the increase in poor mental health specifically within students in higher education highlights a need to understand what the risk factors are and what might be done within these settings. This ensures young people are learning and developing and transitioning into adulthood in environments that promote mental wellbeing (Campbell et al. 2022).

According to a research released by African Woman and Child, a magazine that supports women's rights, domestic and gender-based violence is prevalent among university students in Kenya. The paper titled "Universities remain the most unsafe place for female students" emphasizes the occurrence of fatalities among female students while attending college, a place where women pursue their aspirations and transform them into reality (Oginga, 2018). Psychological treatment assists individuals in attaining mastery over their emotions. The primary goal is to provide treatment for persons experiencing a wide range of emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties or disorders. University students are not immune to the emotions that often result in various types of social conduct.

The Kenyan Commission for University Education (2019) stipulates that counseling is an essential service that must be available to students in universities before accreditation. The increasing prevalence of social issues among Kenyan youth has become a significant worry in our society. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct this research. Upon entering university, there is a noticeable rise in psychological distress levels. Recent studies indicate that mental health issues, such as self-harm and suicide, are becoming more prevalent among university students. This has led to an increased demand for mental health services and reports of certain universities experiencing a twofold increase in the number of students seeking support (Campbell et al., 2022).

Universities have witnessed violent protests and destruction of property including those of the community, risky sexual behaviour that has ended in many female students becoming pregnant and careless drinking by students in the villages surrounding the universities, suicide, murder and academic stress (Kaggwa et al, 2022). All these types of behaviours have been of concern to parents, lecturers, counselors, the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders. Notably, anxiety and depression cause difficulties across social, occupational and every day functioning. Dysfunctional social behaviour has been implicated in the experience of depression. People with greater depressive symptoms report more frequent negative social interactions and react more strongly to them (Koutsimani et al., 2019). For example, in the case of the prime suspect in the murder of a Moi University medical student in 2017 where he confessed to the crime, telling a court that jealousy took over him when he saw her hugging another man (Ominde, 2023).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

University life is most of the time perceived as overwhelming and stressful time in four aspects of student's adjustments in university life such as for social, academic, institutional attachment and personal-emotional adjustment. The first-year students for instance experience a lot of social difficulties such as moving away from their primary support systems-parents and intellectual challenges including more demanding course work or heavy work load. In addition, to the above-mentioned factors university life can be filled with emotional stressors such as loneliness, home sickness, grief, confusion and uncertainty all related to break from their primary attachment figures-parents and or other loved ones (Ayele, 2018). Another study on students' aggression and its relevance to personal, family and social factors by Mahmood and Kakamad (2018) indicated that aggression for in-dorm students was higher than those students who lived out of dorm. These findings justify that students usually live in stressful conditions and far from their home. There was a significant variation noted in students' anti-social behaviour due to school related challenges as revealed by a

study on the causes of students' antisocial behaviour (Khaliq & Rasool, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial not only to establish a counseling infrastructure but also to implement psychological counseling interventions in Kenyan universities. Without addressing these issues, university management could face a decrease in graduation success rates and numerous other operational challenges. It is against this backdrop, that the current study was conducted to explore the influence of psychological counseling interventions on behavioural adjustments among university students in Uasin Gishu County.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The general aim of this study was to investigate the influence of social skills on behavioural adjustments among university students in Uasin Gishu County. The research hypothesis was:

There is no significant relationship between social skills and behavioural adjustments among university students in Uasin Gishu County.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

This study used the convergent parallel design which is a model from among the mixed methods research designs that entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process, weighs the methods equally, analyzes the two components independently and interprets the results together (Creswell, 2011). In the qualitative strand, a phenomenological design was used in the study to describe and interpret the experiences of participants with the aim of understanding the experiences as perceived by the respondents (Creswell, 2011). Phenomenological research design enabled the use of in-depth interview for the key informants (counselors) in Uasin Gishu County that was involved in the study.

2.2. Location of the study

The study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County. The study was conducted in universities within Eldoret town, in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Uasin Gishu County was selected as it hosted public and private universities.

2.3. Target population and sample size

The target population of interest in the study was all universities in Uasin Gishu County, all students and all counselors. The study population comprised of 85,000 students, 6 universities and 10 counselors. The researcher adopted simple random sampling procedure to select the students from the sampled public and private universities. The sample size was determined using the fisher formula. The following sample size formula for infinite population is used to arrive at a representative number of respondents (Godden, 2004):

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times p(1-p)}{M^2}$$

Where:

SS= Sample Size for infinite population (more than 50,000)

Z = Z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

P = population proportion (expressed as decimal) (assumed to be 0.3 (30%) since this would provide the maximum sample size).

M = Margin of Error at 5% (0.05)

n = 323

2.4. Data collection and analysis

The study utilized questionnaires for students and in-depth interview guide for counselors. The data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis processes. Qualitative data was transcribed and analyzed through themes, for quantitative data analysis, the researcher first defined variables and assign numeric values and labels to the variables. SPSS version 20 was used to key in the variables. Data was presented by use of tables and figures. The researcher also employed inferential statistics in analyzing quantitative data. In the current study, analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was used to analyze the hypotheses. The type of relationship between independent and dependent variables was determined by running scatter plots to determine whether the relationship was linear or non-linear. Specifically, the researcher was interested in establishing whether psychological counseling interventions (Social skills) (independent variables) had any relationship with behavioural adjustments among students (dependent variable).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Social skills on behavioral adjustments among university students

The first goal of this study was to establish the social skills on behavioural adjustments among university students Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. As it turned out, 72 (36.0%) stated consistently keeping eye contact during conversations, (67.5%) indicated that they consistently demonstrate appreciation by verbalizing their gratitude through the use of the phrase Thank you, in response to acts of kindness directed towards them. Results also showed 100 (50.0%), reported that they always take turns with others. Some students have embraced turn taking as a natural part of their social interactions, while others may struggle with consistently engaging in this behaviour or may avoid it altogether. Turn taking is a crucial aspect of effective communication and social interactions (Schegloff, 2007). Engaging in this behaviour fosters a sense of cooperation, respect, and empathy in social exchanges, ultimately contributing to the development of positive relationships and social well-being.

Findings reveal majority of students, 118 (59.0%), reported that they always listen to others when they talk. Rosengren (2000) notes that active listening is a fundamental social skill that involves not only hearing but also understanding, interpreting, and responding to others' messages. Majority of students, 89 (44.5%), reported that they always help others when they need assistance. Most of the sampled students 65 (32.5%) said that they always make friends easily. This finding indicates a considerable level of social competence among these students, who are adept at initiating and maintaining social connections. The investigation stresses the importance of social skills, mainly in the context of making friends, in influencing students' behavioural adjustments. Students who possess strong social skills are more likely to experience positive social interactions, a sense of belonging, and higher levels of social support (Wentzel et al. 2010). Making friends easily can enhance students' overall well-being and contribute to their successful adaptation to university life. For students who reported challenges in making friends (e.g., those who never make friends easily), psychological counseling interventions can be beneficial in building their social skills and self-confidence.

The question that students felt that they were disliked by others 64 (32.0%) reported once. Students who feel disliked once or several times may also benefit from counseling support to address any lingering negative feelings and to navigate challenging social situations effectively. The perception of being disliked may be influenced by various factors, including social anxiety, low self-esteem, or past negative social experiences. Results showed 93 (46.5%) students reported that they never interrupt others when someone is talking, indicating a high level of social competence and respectful communication. Students who interrupted others may benefit from psychological counseling interventions to enhance their social communication skills.

Majority of the students 96 (48.0%), stated that they do not feel bossy, students' perceptions of being bossy highlights the importance of assertiveness and leadership tendencies in shaping students' social behaviour. Interventions in psychological counseling that place a high priority on developing appropriate assertiveness and leadership skills have the potential to enhance students' overall well-being and aid in their integration into the university environment. The finding is in agreement with Tong et al. (2018) who stated that the presence of business has the potential to affect the interpersonal relationships of students and exert an influence on the dynamics within a group. Individuals that have a tendency towards assertiveness may be more inclined to assume leadership roles and responsibilities. While this can be advantageous in certain contexts, it may also give rise to interpersonal difficulties if not effectively regulated.

3.2. Hypothesis testing

ANOVA test was used to test the significance of this relationship at 0.05, significance level.

Table 1 ANOVA on the Influence of Social Skills on Behavioural Adjustments

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14532.441	25	581.298	5.573	.000
Within Groups	18044.313	173	104.302		
Total	32576.754	198			

Dependent Variable: Behavioural Adjustment; Predictors: (Constant), Social Skills

Findings presented show that the p-value (Sig.) is less than the typical significance level of 0.05, thus we reject the hypothesis ($F(25,173) = 5.573$, $p < .05$). This suggests that there is a significant difference in behavioural adjustments among groups based on varying levels of social skills. In other words, social skills serve as a significant predictor of behavioural adjustments. The F-statistic of 5.573 indicates that the difference in behavioural adjustments is not likely due to random chance but is associated with the variation in social skills levels among the students. The study also employed scatter plots too to provide empirical evidence supporting the conclusion that there exists a positive relationship between social skills and student behavioural adjustment.

Qualitative findings on the relationship between students' level and behavioural adjustment among university students were also obtained from interviews. In relation to the levels of counseling and behavioural adjustment, the study established that the counselors respond differently to the extent that students related to them when they sought psychological counseling.

These are some substantiating statements from C003 that bear testimony to this:

Students in their first-year face various challenges that include homesickness as a common struggle for many students. What often hurts about being homesick is not simply that the student is away from home, but rather that he or she hasn't made the university another place to call home. Returning home often (or focusing on wanting to be back home) can keep the homesick student from creating familiarity.

4. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the significant impact of social skills and behavioral adjustments in among university students in UasinGishu in Kenya. The findings reveal that social skills have an important role in shaping behavioural adaptations. Hence, it is imperative that the university setting fosters an environment that promotes the utilization of psychological counseling services as a means of addressing students' social skills. This may explain why numerous campuses across the nation have encountered periods of turmoil, leading to the damage of property. The actions exhibited by learners have been lacking in their ability to effectively adapt to social situations inside the university setting.

Recommendation

The study recommends that university administration in Uasin Gishu County should evaluate the counseling interventions offered, their accessibility, and the level of student awareness regarding these services. The university should conduct training programs for faculty and staff to enhance their ability to recognize signs of behavioural challenges among students. Equipping educators with the skills to identify and respond to students in need can facilitate early intervention. University administration should have a clear control policy for undesirable behaviour of the students so that students can have a peaceful learning environment.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest in the authorship of this research.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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