

The Effectiveness of the Person Centered Counselling Approach to Overcome Academic Adaptation Problems of University Students

N.A.H.L. Karunarathna¹, Ven. Karandagolle Wijithatissa²

Introduction

University enrollment is a crucial and transformative milestone in the life of a student in the higher education system of Sri Lanka. The main challenge faced by students who leave the secondary education system and enter the tertiary education system is to successfully adapt to this new environment (Baker and Siryk 1984). While the new life of university offers students freedom and new opportunities, it also brings with it a lot of responsibilities and challenges. In this context, it is seen that the majority of students face various academic adaptation problems. Academic adaptation is the ability of a student to meet the academic requirements of a university, embrace new learning methods, and maintain a positive attitude in the academic environment. Sri Lankan university students, especially first-year students, are facing severe difficulties in adjusting to the new liberal education system, self-study styles, managing lecture notes, having to study in English, and continuous assessments and examination stress (Perera and Silva 2018). In addition, hostel life, being away from family, economic hardship, and social challenges in making new friends, also directly contributes to intensifying these academic adjustment problems. When a university student receives such a safe, non-judgmental, and empathetic environment through counseling, he/she is motivated to eliminate their fears and stress and understand the causes of their adjustment problems themselves (Corey 2017). This increases their self-esteem and self-efficacy and builds their ability to cope successfully in the new environment.

Main Objective

To evaluate the person-centered counseling approach to resolve the adjustment problems faced by first-year students newly entering the university system and to improve their mental well-being.

1 Department of Philosophy and Psychology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. hansenkarunarathna12@gmail.com

2 Department of Philosophy and Psychology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. wijitha@sjp.ac.lk

Specific Objectives

To identify the main adjustment problems faced by university students.

Studying the psychological distress experienced by students as they adapt to the university environment

To observe the difference in students' academic performance before and after participating in person-centered counseling sessions.

To study how the person-centered approach contributes to developing students' self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Research Methodology

The methodology of this research was qualitative. This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Data were collected through structured interviews to obtain participants' views, experiences, and interpretations related to the specific objectives. The collected data are then analyzed thematically to identify key patterns, meanings, and themes relevant to the aim and objectives of the study. The sample of the study consisted of 30 first-year students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. The participants were selected from among the students who had sought counselling services from the Student Support Centre. The sample included 20 female students and 10 male students. Since the participants were selected based on their availability and their connection with the counselling service, the study used a convenience sampling method.

Findings and Discussion

The first objective of the study was to identify the main adjustment problems faced by university students. The findings revealed that many students had difficulty adapting to the self-directed learning model of the university. In the school system, students were usually guided closely by teachers, tuition classes, and parents. However, the university system expects students to take more responsibility for their own learning. This sudden shift created confusion among first-year students. The findings suggest that academic adjustment is not only a matter of subject knowledge but also a matter of psychological readiness. Students need confidence, independence, and emotional stability to adjust successfully to the open learning environment of the university.

Another important adjustment problem was the fear of studying in English. Many students, especially those from rural educational backgrounds, reported that English created barriers to understanding lectures, writing assignments, and

participating in classroom discussions. This finding shows that language difficulty can become an emotional problem as well as an academic problem. Students did not merely lack language skills; they also experienced shame, fear, and hesitation. Therefore, English-medium learning may affect students' self-confidence and academic participation if proper psychological support is not provided.

The findings also revealed that continuous assessments, presentations, assignments, and mid-term examinations and fear of exams created considerable stress among students. Many first-year students were unfamiliar with managing several academic tasks within fixed deadlines. As a result, they experienced pressure and emotional instability. This indicates that time management problems are closely connected with emotional adjustment. When students are anxious or overwhelmed, they find it difficult to plan their studies properly. Therefore, academic support alone may not be sufficient; emotional support is also necessary to help students manage university responsibilities effectively.

The second objective of the study was to observe the difference in students' academic performance before and after participating in person-centered counselling sessions. The findings suggest that person-centered counselling positively supported students' academic adjustment. After the counselling sessions, students were better able to prepare study plans, manage time, participate in learning activities, and face examinations with more confidence. This improvement can be understood as the result of increased emotional stability. When students felt accepted and understood by the counsellor, they were able to reduce fear and think more clearly about their academic responsibilities.

The person-centered approach was especially useful because it did not impose advice on students. Instead, it helped them explore their own feelings, strengths, weaknesses, and possible solutions (Rogers, 1957). This is important because university students are young adults who need to develop independence and responsibility. If counsellors only give instructions, students may become dependent on external guidance. However, person-centered counselling encourages students to discover their own capacity for problem-solving. Therefore, the approach is suitable for helping first-year students adapt to the independent learning culture of the university.

The third objective of the study was to examine how the person-centered approach contributes to developing students' self-efficacy and self-esteem. The findings clearly show that the counselling process helped students develop greater belief in their own abilities. Before counselling, some students believed that they could not understand difficult subjects, study in English, or compete with other students. After counselling, they became more confident in facing academic

challenges. This indicates an improvement in self-efficacy. When students believe that they can manage difficulties through their own effort, they are more likely to engage actively in learning.

The findings also indicate that person-centered counselling contributed to the development of self-esteem. Some students had low self-esteem because they compared themselves with peers who seemed more capable, fluent, or confident. Through unconditional positive regard, students felt accepted without judgement. This helped them recognize their own personal value and abilities. As their self-esteem improved, they became more willing to ask questions, express opinions, and participate in classroom activities. Therefore, self-esteem appears to be an important psychological factor in academic participation and university adjustment.

A significant finding of the study is that person centered counselling contributed not only to short-term problem solving but also to long-term emotional resilience. Students learned to understand their emotions, analyze their problems, and identify possible solutions by themselves. This shows that counselling should not be limited to giving temporary advice for immediate academic problems. Rather, counselling can help students build inner strength to face future difficulties. In this sense, the person-centered approach supports both academic development and personal growth.

Overall, the findings of the study suggest that first-year students' adjustment problems are multidimensional. Academic difficulties, language barriers, time management issues, examination fear, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and emotional wellbeing are closely interconnected. The person-centered approach is useful because it addresses the emotional foundation behind these academic problems. By providing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and a non judgmental environment, counsellors can help students reduce fear, develop confidence, and take responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, the Student Support Centre can play an important role in improving students' academic adjustment, psychological wellbeing, and long-term resilience during the transition to university life.

Conclusion

The study concludes that first-year students experience various academic and emotional adjustment problems when entering the university environment, including difficulty adapting to self-directed learning, fear of studying in English, stress related to continuous assessments, examination fear, low self-confidence, and low self-esteem. The findings show that person-centered counselling provided through the Student Support Centre helped students to understand

their emotions, reduce fear and stress, improve time management, and develop confidence in facing academic challenges. The approach was especially effective because it created an empathetic, accepting, and non-judgmental environment in which students could recognize their own abilities and personal value. Therefore, person-centered counselling can be considered an effective support method for improving students' academic adjustment, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and long-term emotional resilience during the transition from school to university. However it should be noted that there are additional factors to consider in managing these problems of students and building their mental well being. Since the focus of the study is the Student Support Center, the issues related to it have been analyzed, but it should be noted that there are methods to build students mental well being and solve students problems outside the Student Support Center.

Keywords - University students, Academic adaptation problems, Person centered approach, Resilience, effectiveness

References

- Baker, R.W. and Siryk, B., (1984). Measuring adjustment to college. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31(2), pp.179-189.
- Corey, G., 2017. *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*. (10th ed). Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Perera, H. and Silva, A. (2018). A study on stress and academic performance of Sri Lankan university students. *Journal of Local Counseling*, 4(1), pp. 45-58.
- Rogers, C.R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 21(2), pp.95-103.