

Adjustment Difficulties and Cognitive Counseling Intervention in a 10th-Grade Vocational High School Student

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the dynamics of adjustment in a 10th-grade vocational high school student who experiences difficulties adapting to a new school environment. The subject is a 16-year-old female student who showed significant behavioral changes from being active and socially engaged to becoming withdrawn, quiet, and experiencing social anxiety after entering the new school. The methods used include interviews, observations, and psychological assessments (16 PF, DAP, BAUM, and HTP). The assessment results indicate tendencies toward social anxiety, overthinking, distrust of the social environment, and a strong need for social acceptance. Contributing factors include negative past experiences, environmental changes, and maladaptive thought patterns. The intervention was conducted through individual counseling using a cognitive approach combined with relaxation techniques and social skills training. The results show improvements in self-awareness, anxiety management, and the emergence of initiative in social interactions. However, the client still exhibits overthinking in certain situations. Overall, the intervention is considered effective in supporting the adjustment process, with a favorable prognosis if supported by a conducive environment and consistent follow-up interventions.

Keywords: *Adjustment, Social Anxiety, Vocational High School Student, Cognitive Counseling, Social Skills, Psychological Intervention*

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by significant psychological, social, and environmental changes. One of the major challenges faced by adolescents is the ability to adjust to new environments, particularly during school transitions. Adjustment difficulties often emerge when individuals are unable to balance internal needs with external demands, leading to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviors. In educational settings, poor adjustment can manifest as social withdrawal, anxiety, and decreased academic engagement, making it an important issue to address within school-based psychological services (Schneiders, 1964). Therefore, understanding adjustment problems

among students, especially during transitions to vocational high schools, is highly relevant for promoting students' psychological well-being and academic success.

Previous studies have shown that social anxiety and maladaptive cognitive patterns play a significant role in students' adjustment difficulties. Cognitive theories suggest that negative automatic thoughts and fear of evaluation can hinder social interaction and adaptation (Beck, 2011). Additionally, research on social cognition indicates that past interpersonal experiences shape how individuals perceive and respond to new social environments (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). While many studies have explored adjustment issues broadly, there is still limited research focusing on individual case-based interventions that integrate cognitive restructuring, relaxation techniques, and social skills training in vocational school contexts. This gap highlights the need for in-depth case studies to better understand the complexity of adjustment difficulties and effective intervention strategies.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the psychological dynamics of adjustment difficulties experienced by a 10th-grade vocational high school student and to evaluate the effectiveness of a cognitive-based counseling intervention. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: how can cognitive counseling combined with relaxation and social skills training support the adjustment process of a student experiencing social anxiety and maladaptive thinking patterns in a new school environment?

The contribution of this research lies in providing a comprehensive case analysis that integrates assessment, conceptualization, and intervention within a real educational setting. This study offers practical insights into the application of cognitive counseling techniques for addressing adjustment difficulties among adolescents. Furthermore, it contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating how individualized, school-based psychological interventions can effectively improve students' social functioning and emotional regulation. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for school counselors, psychologists, and educators in designing targeted interventions for students experiencing similar challenges.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the adjustment difficulties experienced by a vocational high school student and to evaluate the effectiveness of a cognitive counseling intervention. A case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex psychological phenomena within a real-life context. This design is particularly suitable for examining individual experiences, behavioral patterns, and intervention outcomes in a holistic manner.

The subject of this study was a 16-year-old female student enrolled in the 10th grade of a vocational high school. The participant was selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, namely experiencing difficulties in social adjustment, showing symptoms of social anxiety, and being referred by the school counselor for psychological assistance. Additional sources of information included the school counselor and one

classmate, who provided supporting data regarding the participant's behavior and social interactions in the school environment.

Data were collected using multiple methods to ensure data triangulation. These methods included semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and psychological assessments. Interviews were conducted with the participant, school counselor, and a peer to obtain comprehensive information regarding the participant's background, emotional condition, and social experiences. Observations were carried out in both classroom and counseling settings to examine behavioral patterns and social interactions. Psychological tests administered included the 16 Personality Factors (16 PF) to assess personality traits, as well as projective tests such as Draw-A-Person (DAP), Baum Test, and House-Tree-Person (HTP) to explore emotional dynamics and underlying psychological conditions. In addition, counseling sessions were conducted as part of the intervention process using a cognitive approach combined with relaxation techniques and social skills training.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis. The collected data were organized, categorized, and interpreted to identify patterns related to adjustment difficulties, cognitive distortions, and behavioral responses. The analysis process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, and test results) was applied to enhance the validity of the findings. The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated by comparing the participant's condition before and after the counseling sessions, focusing on changes in cognitive patterns, emotional regulation, and social behavior.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

This section presents the main findings of the study based on the assessment and intervention process conducted with the participant. The results are organized according to the research objective, which is to describe the participant's adjustment difficulties and changes observed after the intervention.

The initial findings indicate that the participant experienced significant difficulties in social adjustment after transitioning to a new school environment. The participant reported frequent crying, social withdrawal, fear of negative evaluation, and physical symptoms such as trembling, rapid heartbeat, and chest tightness. These symptoms appeared consistently during the early period of school entry and occurred repeatedly in social situations.

1. Interview Results

Based on the interview data, the participant is a 10th-grade vocational high school student who reported experiencing emotional distress after entering a new school environment. Initially, the participant was able to attend the orientation period without significant difficulties. However, after the start of regular academic activities, the participant began to cry frequently in class and reported experiencing physical discomfort such as chest tightness. The participant expressed concerns about not having

friends and feeling excluded, especially because she perceived that her classmates had already formed their own social groups. The participant also reported fear of being negatively evaluated by others and frequently engaged in overthinking, particularly at night, which affected her sleep quality. Information from the school counselor indicated that the participant showed a noticeable change in behavior compared to her previous school, where she was described as active and socially engaged. A peer also reported that attempts had been made to initiate interaction, but the participant often did not respond, resulting in reduced social engagement.

2. Observation Results

Observations conducted in classroom and counseling settings showed that the participant displayed limited social interaction. She tended to remain silent, avoided initiating communication, and provided minimal responses when approached by others. During classroom activities, the participant appeared tense, often clasping her hands and avoiding eye contact. In counseling sessions, the participant showed physical signs such as trembling hands, fidgeting, and covering her face. Her voice was low and her facial expressions appeared flat. In several sessions, the participant appeared distracted, particularly by her mobile phone. Across multiple observations, there were moments where the participant showed slight behavioral variation, such as brief eye contact and occasional smiling, although these were not consistently observed.

3. Graphic Test Results (DAP, BAUM, HTP)

- Draw-a-Person (DAP):

Table 1: Draw-a-Person (DAP)

NO	Aspect	Findings	Indications
1	Position of Drawing	Centered	Indicates a need for balance and presence in the environment
2	Use of Space	Relatively large	Suggests a desire for recognition or self-expression
3	Line Quality	Moderate and stable pressure	Reflects adequate emotional control
4	Details	Presence of facial features, incomplete body proportions, limited clothing detail	Indicates self-expression with some insecurity or incompleteness in self-concept

- Baum Tree Test (BAUM):

Table 2: Baum Tree Test (BAUM)

NO	Aspect	Findings	Indications
1	Position of Drawing	Upper-central area	Suggests orientation toward imagination or aspiration

2	Use of Space	Wide and expansive	Indicates openness and need for expression
3	Line Quality	Directed and consistent	Reflects controlled expression and intentionality
4	Details	Tree with crown, trunk, additional elements such as grass or environmental features	Indicates imaginative capacity and engagement with surroundings

- House-Tree-Person (HTP):

Table 3: House-Tree-Person (HTP)

NO	Aspect	Findings	Indications
1	Proportion	Figure relatively larger than house	Suggests emphasis on self over environment
2	Position	Close placement between objects	Indicates a need for closeness or connection
3	Structural Elements	House with doors and windows	Reflects awareness of social boundaries
4	Details	Inclusion of tree, house, and person with varying levels of detail	Indicates cognitive engagement with multiple aspects of environment

4. 16 Personality Factors Test Results

The results of the 16 PF assessment indicate that the participant tends to be reserved in social situations and shows low levels of sociability. The participant demonstrates moderate emotional stability but shows increased tension in certain situations. The results also reflect a tendency toward independence, suggesting a preference for working individually. Sensitivity to environmental stimuli is present, along with cautiousness in interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the participant shows some flexibility in adapting to rules and situational demands, while also experiencing internal tension in specific contexts.

Overall, the findings obtained from interviews, observations, and psychological assessments describe the participant's condition in terms of behavioral patterns, emotional responses, and personality characteristics during the assessment phase.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the participant experienced significant difficulties in adjusting to a new school environment, which were reflected in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. The presence of social withdrawal, fear of negative evaluation, and physical symptoms such as chest tightness and trembling suggests that the

participant exhibited characteristics consistent with social anxiety. In addition, the participant's tendency toward overthinking and negative assumptions about peer perception indicates the presence of maladaptive cognitive patterns. These results are important because they demonstrate how adjustment difficulties in adolescents can manifest holistically, affecting emotional regulation, social interaction, and daily functioning (Beck, 2011).

The findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of cognitive distortions in the development and maintenance of social anxiety. According to cognitive theory, individuals who experience anxiety tend to interpret social situations as threatening due to negative automatic thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs (Clark & Wells, 1995). The participant's belief that peers had already formed exclusive groups and would reject her aligns with this framework. Furthermore, the results from the graphic tests and personality assessment support existing literature suggesting that internal emotional conflicts and sensitivity to social evaluation can influence self-expression and interpersonal behavior (Machover, 1949; Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970). Compared to prior studies, this case provides a more detailed illustration of how these cognitive and emotional processes operate within a specific educational context, particularly in vocational high school settings.

The intervention conducted in this study, which combined cognitive counseling, relaxation techniques, and social skills training, showed observable changes in the participant's behavior and emotional responses. The participant demonstrated increased awareness of negative thought patterns, improved ability to manage anxiety, and gradual engagement in social interaction. These findings are in line with previous studies indicating that cognitive-behavioral approaches are effective in reducing anxiety symptoms and improving social functioning among adolescents (Hofmann et al., 2012). The inclusion of relaxation techniques also contributed to reducing physiological symptoms of anxiety, while social skills training provided practical strategies for interacting with peers. This combination of techniques highlights the importance of using integrative approaches in addressing adjustment difficulties.

Despite these findings, this study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the use of a single-case study design limits the generalizability of the results to a broader population. Second, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, which may not fully capture long-term changes in the participant's adjustment process. Third, the reliance on qualitative data and subjective assessment methods may introduce potential bias in interpretation. Additionally, external factors such as family environment and peer dynamics were not explored in depth, which may also influence the participant's adjustment (Yin, 2018).

The findings of this study have several implications for both research and practice. For practitioners, the results highlight the importance of early identification of adjustment difficulties and the implementation of structured counseling interventions in school settings. School counselors and psychologists are encouraged to integrate cognitive approaches with relaxation and social skills training to address both cognitive and behavioral aspects of adjustment problems. For future research, it is recommended to

conduct studies with larger samples and longer intervention periods to examine the effectiveness of similar interventions more comprehensively. Additionally, further research could explore the role of family support and peer relationships in facilitating students' adjustment to new environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the participant experienced significant adjustment difficulties when transitioning to a new school environment, which were reflected in emotional distress, social withdrawal, and maladaptive cognitive patterns such as overthinking and fear of negative evaluation. The findings from interviews, observations, and psychological assessments consistently showed that these difficulties affected the participant's social functioning and emotional regulation. The implementation of a cognitive-based counseling intervention, combined with relaxation techniques and social skills training, was associated with observable improvements in self-awareness, anxiety management, and gradual engagement in social interactions.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing both cognitive and behavioral aspects in supporting adolescents' adjustment processes. Early identification and intervention within school settings play a crucial role in preventing the escalation of psychological difficulties. For practical application, school counselors and psychologists are encouraged to implement structured and integrative intervention programs tailored to students' needs.

For future research, it is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and extend the duration of intervention to examine long-term effectiveness. Further studies may also explore additional factors such as family support, peer relationships, and environmental influences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' adjustment in educational settings.

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