

ADAPTIVE COPING STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING DISCIPLINE IN LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Most learners experience significant amounts of stress in their daily lives, which greatly influence their performance, social interaction and their behavior at large. A study by the American Psychological Association revealed that learners report stress levels similar to adults. This means teens are experiencing significant levels of chronic stress and feel their stress level generally exceed their ability to cope effectively and as result of the chronic stress, it leads to academic disengagement, suicidal thoughts, misbehaviors and mental health problems. Practicing stress relief techniques is essential in order to manage overwhelming situations that can expose a learner to indiscipline actions. In consideration of these facts, there was a need to undertake a study on adaptive coping strategies for enhancing discipline in learners. The objective of the study was to explore positive stress coping strategies employed by learners to manage behavior. Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura guided the study, which theorizes that learning occurs in a social context of a continuously changing and mutual interaction among the person, environment, and behaviour. The population was 43 public secondary schools, and a sample of 36 public secondary schools were randomly selected. Participants in the study included deputy principals, guidance and counselling teachers, and school prefects. The study employed cross-sectional survey design and mixed method approach. Anonymity, confidentiality and reliability was observed. Results of the study were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science, version 27. The result was presented in tables and figures. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data collected, and corroboration done based on the knowledge gaps identified. Triangulation followed, both quantitative and qualitative findings were interpreted together to give specific recommendation. The study findings shows that when stress coping strategies are well observed, it will positively and near moderately ($r=.294$ when $p\text{-value}=.001$ when $\alpha=.05$) predict the behavior of the learners. The study recommends collaborative efforts among teachers, school officials and parents to promote adaptive coping practices. The paper contributes valuable empirical data on coping strategies in the African education context and emphasizes psychological approaches over punitive disciplinary measures.

Keywords: Discipline, Psychological, Determinant, Indiscipline.

Introduction

Negative influences are to blame for the mental status at the beginning of tumult, and this comes in definite forms, which also appear as signs of

indiscipline (Oyoo, Kodero & Sichari, 2017) in the students' case. Coming into contact with negative forms of psychological influences in the form of negative peer pressure, trauma, use of drugs, and

chronic loneliness, has the capacity to stop and interrupt healthy teen brain growth (Ballard, 2023).

In the US, for instance, new evidence portrays the COVID-19 pandemic as having played a negative role in affecting the mental well-being of the majority of children and youths. In addition, among national high school students, notable increases between the periods 2009 and 2019 are realized for having persistent sadness or hopelessness (26.1% to 36.7%), having seriously considered attempting to kill themselves (13.8% to 18.8%), and having tried to commit suicide (6.3% to 8.9%). This depicts that, learners lack adaptive stress coping strategies to conquer obstacles they encounter in life.

In the Nigerian education system, Ugwuanyi et al. (2020) found that, the performance of students in both external and internal examinations is on the downward trend due to neglected impact of stress management practices such as exercise, listening to music, watching movies, sharing among others, which are contributing factors to good decision making and self-control practices as well (Morales et al., 2020). Currently, educators often rely on strategies of punishment and external restore discipline which has elevated enmity between the teacher and the learner thus, the study focused on positive self-adjusting practices that a learner can enforce to combat negative forces resulting in misbehavior.

In most schools in Kenya, learners have poor attitudes towards teachers, fellow peers, school society, and feels dissatisfied in life. Besides, Zainabu, Oyoo, and Onyango (2024) added that, life dissatisfaction might predict indiscipline tendency. Therefore, by educating learners on adaptive coping strategies for enhancing discipline, they abide with the rules and regulations of institution, maintaining healthy habits which strengthens decision making, positivity in learning, productivity, time management, and overall well-being. When learners are timely informed of the adaptive stress coping strategies, feelings of

rejection, loneliness and suicidal thoughts are completely eliminated.

Research Methodology

Cross-sectional survey research design was used in a mixed method approach, since it aimed at describing generalized relationships between distinct elements and conditions (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). The design helped in establishing preliminary evidence in planning a future advanced study.

Piloting was conducted to ascertain the dependability of the research instruments using the test-retest method. The instruments were used for data collection after attaining reliability index of .79 which is adequate as justified by Bolarinwa (2015). Content validity was achieved by the help of the experts from the department of educational psychology and science, Rongo University. It was used after reaching the content validity index threshold of .7. The instruments were considered reliable and valid because they gave reliability and validity index of .7 and above.

Questionnaires were distributed to students in schools that were not selected for the pilot study. The researcher briefed the respondents on the study rationale and the importance of data collection. Simple random sampling was carried out to arrive at the respondents while purposive sampling was used to collect data from guidance and counselling teachers. Interview schedule was used for Guidance and Counseling teachers. Luenendonk (2019) defines interview as a conversation where questions are asked and the corresponding answers given. The setting and execution of the interview ranged from casual to semi-formal to formal, and involved two parties who were the researcher and the respondents. The interviewer's objective was to collect data and information by asking questions, and probing the answers that were given by the interviewee.

The researcher obtained a letter from Rongo University Directorate of Graduate Studies to enable get research authorization from National Commission for Science, Technology and

Innovation (NACOSTI). The researcher made prior visits to schools to establish a rapport and seek permission to collect data.

The researcher shared the purpose of the research to the students and teachers, using the information sheets which had statements on the role of the researcher, activities to be done during data collection, role of the participants in the study and the possible uses of research information, to ensure voluntary participation of individuals as recommended by Gajjar (2013). Privacy and confidentiality whereby, information from the study was safely stored, hard copies under lock and key in a cabinet while soft copies in a password protected laptop. The researcher did not disclose any information shared by the participants to any individual or authority. All the information was kept private, confidential and safe. Anonymity whereby, participants were not identified by names, but rather, codes were used to represent the names.

Quantitative data was analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science version 27, into Percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferentially into t-test and regression. Descriptive statistics generated summaries of the variables in a data set to show what is typical for the sample and Inferential statistics aided in exploring links between variables and making inferences (Kotronoulas, 2023). A t-test was used to compare the means of two group (Jayapriya & Suganthi, 2022). Data was presented into tables and figures.

Qualitative data was analyzed into the emerging and recurring themes using the six steps, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) after which, the analyzed data was corroborated based on the knowledge gaps identified. Triangulation followed, both quantitative and qualitative findings were interpreted together to give specific recommendation.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine difference among means then, presented as Inferential statistical tests to produce a value for probability. The smaller the P value, the smaller the chances are that the null hypothesis is true.

Regression analysis provided explicit estimates of measure for the cause-effect relationship between the individual inputs and the outcome, with an error estimate given by an optimization algorithm that obtained a parametric relationship between the input and the output (Tyagi & Manry, 2022) and the effects of the independent variables on the outcome were summarized with a coefficient linear regression in tables.

Results and Discussions

The study sought to explore adaptive coping strategies to enhance discipline level among learners in public secondary schools. The descriptive statistical analysis of their responses is presented in table 1

Table 1*Adaptive Coping Strategies to Enhance Discipline in Learners*

Item Statement on Stress Coping Strategies Enhancing Discipline		RATINGS					OMR	STD
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
		1	2	3	4	5		
Distress normally triggers misconduct among learners	F	9	22	13	120	134	4.17	1.02
	%	3.0	7.4	4.4	40.3	45.0		
Creating a good environment enhance decision making	F	9	11	7	101	170	4.38	.930
	%	3.0	3.7	2.3	33.9	57.0		
Adopting self-control approaches reduces peer pressure	F	15	24	50	102	107	3.88	1.14
	%	5.0	8.1	16.8	34.2	35.9		
Positive strategies like listening to music improve desired behaviours	F	26	20	30	131	91	3.81	1.20
	%	8.7	6.7	10.1	44.0	30.5		
Negative strategies like fighting solve stress	F	69	73	57	55	44	2.77	1.38
	%	23.2	24.5	19.1	18.5	14.8		
Sharing with teachers / parents can help overcome negative influences	F	18	19	18	96	147	4.12	1.16
	%	6.0	6.4	6.0	32.2	49.3		
Appropriate counseling skills provided to learners leads to behavior change	F	4	10	20	144	120	4.23	.820
	%	1.3	3.4	6.7	48.3	40.3		
Engaging in hobbies are strategies to control stress	F	10	15	38	123	112	4.05	1.00
	%	3.4	5.0	12.8	41.3	37.6		
Positive stress coping strategies are determinants of a healthy mind set and good conduct	F	8	17	47	105	121	4.05	1.02
	%	2.7	5.7	15.8	35.2	40.6		

Table 1 shows descriptive statistical analysis of the responses where: OMR- overall mean rating, STD- standard deviation, Likert scale measures; SD- strongly disagree, D- disagree, N- neutral, A- agree and SA- strongly agree. F-frequencies and %-percentages.

In Table 1, 45.0 percent of respondents strongly agreed that distress normally leads to misconduct among learners. Another 40.3 percent of the respondents agreed that, learners become psychologically distressed that normally leads to misconduct among them. Cumulatively, 85.3 per cent of the respondents agreed that distress normally leads to misconduct among learners. This construct was overallly endorsed by the participants, with a mean of 4.17 (a possible highest mean value of 5.0) and a standard deviation of 1.02. The findings fill the gap that

Ballard (2023) left in the view that psychological distress has the potential to destabilize and hinder the day-to-day life of the students. It was also clarified by Oyoo, Kodero, and Sichari (2017) that in the process of rising up in a social upsurge, everyone's whole lifestyle gets disrupted. In the current circumstance, there will be visible and expected observable demonstrations that might bodily express themselves, since body language remains still the most reliable expression of internal situations. This interruption or interference is what will normally lead to misconduct or indiscipline. The analyzed qualitative data revealed that learners should be counseled on ways of managing stressful situations that they may find themselves in. The verbatim of one of the respondents on this theme was that:

If pregnancy stresses girl-child learners, then they should avoid having sex before marriage or alternatively they should refrain from engaging in unprotected sex. More sex education should be advocated for among school going teenagers. (C021)

It is true that sources of distress are many for the learners in secondary schools. There need to be a well-designed awareness program in secondary schools for learners to equip them with appropriate coping strategies. This way cases of misconduct because of unpreparedness will be avoided. Awareness programs increase knowledge and understanding of important issues, positive behavioral changes, reduced risk of incidents and a stronger organizational culture. These programs empower learners to recognize potential threats, make informed decisions, and take appropriate action, leading to a more secure and productive environment.

According to Table 1, the majority of the respondents, 57.0 percent, highly agreed that having a good environment will enhance decision making in learners. Further, an additional 33.9 percent of the respondents agreed that, having a good environment will promote healthy discussions and decision making. This was overall endorsed by the respondents with a mean rating of 4.38 (on a possible maximum mean rating of 5.0) and standard deviation of .930. The findings concurred with the Divyansh et al. (2022) in the context on having ideal sharing environment, where students feel safe and supported in all aspects of their life. The analyzed qualitative data showed that teachers should always try to maintain a rapport with learners to ensure a close and harmonious relationship with learners in order to understand their feelings or ideas and communicate well. The verbatim of one of the respondents on this theme was that:

Good rapport with learners encourages them to share their opinions and helps them feel more invested in their own learning. Building rapport with learners is key because it allows

relationship to empathize with one another and develop trust. (C014)

Teachers should create rapport with learners in order to eliminate hindrances for growth and confusions that stand in the way of success. When learners have a rapport with their teachers and feel they can relate to their teachers, motivation is higher. A positive and supportive learning environment, fostered by rapport, can lead to better academic performance and a greater willingness to take academic risks, maximizing discipline in all aspects.

From Table 1, 35.9 percent of respondents strongly agreed that adopting self-adjusting approaches helps to overcome negative peer pressure. Another 34.2 per cent of the respondents agreed that, adopting self-adjusting approaches helps to overcome negative peer pressure. Cumulatively, 70.1 per cent of the respondents agreed that adopting self-adjusting approaches helps to overcome negative peer pressure. This construct was overall endorsed by the respondents with a mean rating of 3.88 (out of a possible maximum mean of 5.0) with a standard deviation of 1.14. The result of the study is in line with Huho (2020) work in the passage that, adolescent psychological distresses expose them to negative mind sets since many lack ideas to overcome negative thought, they get lured into unethical actions and behaviors which in turn decrease their self-confidence. The analyzed data revealed that self-control approaches such as taking enough sleep, exercising and taking a break contributes to an individual well-being. This finding further concurs with Zainabu, Oyoo and Onyango (2024) findings that concluded that awareness level can moderately and positively influence the well-being of students. Every learner should therefore be made to understand that they are unique and should strive to embrace their strengths, set healthy boundaries and appreciation for oneself that grows from actions that support our physical, psychological and spiritual growth. Positive stress coping approaches enhance good decision making, academic and professional

success, improved health and increase happiness in learners.

From Table 1, 44.0 percent of the respondents agreed that positive stress coping strategies improve desired behaviors. Another 30.5 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that, positive strategies improve desired behaviors. Cumulatively, 74.5 percent of the respondents agreed that positive corrective strategies improve desired behaviors. This construct was overall endorsed by the respondents with a mean rating of 3.81 (out of a possible maximum mean of 5.0) with a standard deviation of 1.20. From the context, the findings concur with Ballard (2023) suggestion that misconducts are associated with increased rate of drop out, criminal involvement, academic failure and school disengagement which has led to poor relationship with teachers and school community as a whole. For these young people, exclusionary discipline such as suspension or expulsion that removes a student from his or her typical education setting only impedes opportunities to acquire negative ideas to break the connection with teacher and school at large. The analyzed qualitative data showed that negative exclusive disciplinary approaches expose learners to negative peers and are more likely to involve in physical fights, carry weapons, smoke, use alcohol/ drugs and can easily engage in sexual intercourse. Teachers and parents should embrace positive discipline approaches to improve the learners physical and mental well-being, enhance resilience, and increase productivity. They help individuals manage stress levels, reduce the risk of anxiety and depression, and promote a better sense of control and self-esteem.

From table 1, the respondents had mixed views on the construct 'Negative strategies improve desired behaviors' with 23.2 percent strongly disagreeing, 24.5 percent disagreeing, 18.5 percent agreeing and 14.8 percent strongly agreeing. Cumulatively, 47.7 percent not agreeing and only 33.3 percent agreeing that negative strategies improve desired behaviors. Generally, the mean rating for the construct was 2.77 (out of a possible maximum of

5.0) with a standard deviation of 1.33. In line with Ballard (2023) that negative approaches increase rate of academic failure, drop out and criminal involvement, the findings concur and the analyzed data showed that negative strategies only weaken the relationship between the learner and teachers and accelerates disrespect to authorities. The verbatim of one of the respondents on this theme was that:

Learners should be informed of the effect of employing negative stress coping strategies. They need to be guided when they feel overwhelmed before they take any action, if this can be done promptly then cases of suicidal thoughts can be eliminated completely. (CO21)

It is with a view to equip teachers with the skills required to establish, sustain and enhance an outcome-based school counseling program for academic achievement, personal and social development. Prepare teachers with relevant and timely support required to neutralize problem of emotional concerns that would interfere with students' discipline and teaching efficiency.

From Table 1, 48.3 percent concurred that sufficient counseling skills provided to scholars lead to a change in behavior. Another 40.3 percent of the participants strongly concurred that sufficient counselling skills provided to scholars lead to a change in behavior. A total of 88.6 percent of the participants concurred that sufficient counseling skills provided to scholars lead to a change in behavior. Such a notion was overall endorsed by the participants with a mean rate of 4.23 (having a possible maximum mean of 5.0) and a standard deviation of .820. The low deviation indicates that the opinions of the participants in most cases proved to be homogeneous. Such a study's results concur with the postulation presented by Makinde (2020) that the counselors must keep themselves updated in their approach, tools, and skills for an effective counseling and guiding session due to the fact that the world is revolving using the assistance of technology at a relatively high speed; the counselors also must keep themselves updated as

far as the skills and the techniques are involved. Good skills improve communication, enhance self-awareness, and the development of stress coping mechanisms for managing emotions and thoughts.

From Table 1, 41.3 percent also agreed that self-focus, motivation, and self-esteem are self-improvement discipline techniques. Another 37.6 percent of the participants strongly agreed that self-focus, motivation, and self-esteem are self-improvement discipline techniques. In all, 79.9 percent of the participants agreed that self-focus, motivation, and self-esteem are self-improvement discipline techniques. The concept was overwhelmingly supported by the participants with a mean rating of 4.05 (with a possible maximum mean rating of 5.0) and a standard deviation of 1.00. The study finding supports Ugwuanyi et al. (2020) that the performance of the student in both internal and external examinations has suffered a declining trend due to the neglected influence of the variables in the psychological field, like emotional intelligence, self-focus, and self-esteem. The qualitative data that was analysed elaborated that self-focus, esteem, motivation, and social skills are major variables in the psychological field that have a significant role in vitalizing the way the students interpret and deal with several circumstances; this may impact the way the people deal with other people, the way the work is dealt with, and the way stress is coped with. The verbatim of a respondent on this theme was that:

Mental activities like perception, sadness, anger and fear impacts on how adolescents perceive and respond to situations, close study of their mind is necessary for appropriate nurturing for good decision making. (CO17).

There is need therefore to inform adolescents on positive stress management strategies like talking to a friend or family member about how they feel, plan time for activities you enjoy or take up anew hobby, make time to relax, spend time outdoors etc., to avoid exhaustion of the body due to the suppressive effect of stress. Teachers should train

learners to adopt self-directed learning to personalize learning experiences, increase motivation and enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This will also strengthen discipline, improve time management and allow learning at one's own pace, which can be particularly beneficial for students who learn differently or have specific interest.

In Table 1, 40.6 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that positive stress coping strategies are determinants of a healthy mind set. Another 35.2 percent of the respondents agreed that, psychological well-being and peace are positive determinants of a healthy mind set. Cumulatively, 75.8 percent of the respondents agreed that psychological well-being and self-regulation are positive mind set. This construct was overallly endorsed by the respondents' determinants of a healthy with a mean rating of 4.05 (out of a possible maximum mean of 5.0) with a standard deviation of 1.02. The significant effect of psychological well-being on learners has been confirmed in the literature review. The study showed that factors such as peaceful-mind, self-control and motivation acts as mediators in the relationship between academic engagement, discipline and grittiness. Learners with positive well-being are more likely to perform well and achieve academic success in terms of grade or credit and it reduces the risk of engaging in harmful behaviors such as drug abuse, violence and other forms of misconduct. In most cases, mental health conditions like depression and anxiety are often linked to stress. Although it is not possible to completely avoid stress, adaptive coping techniques will enhance learner's conduct and overall well-being, improve performance and lower the risk of developing mental health conditions.

The views of the two categories of the respondents for each sub variable adaptive coping strategies were compared. The analyzed findings of their mean ratings and t-test are presented in table 2.

Table 2*Comparative Views of Respondents on Adaptive Coping Strategies.*

Item Statement on Adaptive Coping Strategies	R	MR	OMR	T-test
Distress normally triggers misconduct among learners	P	4.13	4.17	t(297)=70.7, p=.000
	D/P	4.59		
Creating a good environment enhance decision making	P	4.35	4.38	t(297)=81.1, p=.000
	D/P	4.67		
Adopting self-adjusting approaches reduce peer pressure	P	3.83	3.88	t(297)=58.9, p=.000
	D/P	4.33		
Positive strategies improve desired behaviors	P	3.75	3.81	t(297)=55.0, p=.072
	D/P	4.37		
Negative strategies improve desired behaviors	P	2.77	2.77	t(297)=34.7, p=.000
	D/P	2.74		
Sharing with teachers/parents can help overcome negative influences	P	4.10	4.12	t(297)=61.5, p=.000
	D/P	4.41		
Appropriate counseling skills provided to learners leads to behavior change	P	4.23	4.23	t(297)=88.8, p=.000
	D/P	4.26		
Engaging in hobbies are strategies to control stress	P	4.01	4.05	t(297)=69.6, p=.000
	D/P	4.44		
Positive stress coping strategies are determinants of a healthy mind set and good conduct	P	4.01	4.05	t(297)=68.8, p=.000
	D/P	4.52		

Table 2, shows comparative views of respondents on adaptive coping strategies, where P-Prefects, DP- Deputy Principals, MR- Mean Ratings, OMR- Overall Mean Rating, t-test figures and p-probability values.

In Table 2, the observed p values are all less than the set alpha (.05) except for one sub variable groups. Because this is less than the critical p value (.05), there is statistical evidence that the views of the respondents do not statistically differ.

It is only the sub variable 'Positive corrective strategies improve desired behaviors' where the observed p value is .072, which is above the set alpha (.05). This means that views of the prefect respondents statistically differ from those of deputy principals. The disparity in their argument was based on designation of the respondent in the school. Most deputy principals advocated for positive discipline strategies explaining that, it encourages respectful relationships and promotes mutual trust and understanding between the learner and the teacher. Explaining that, to build

self-esteem, self-image and resilience which is crucial for emotional well-being, positive discipline measures should be enforced and this gap was identified by Ballard (2023) in the context that, there is need to investigate positive disciplinary approaches that can be implemented in schools to bring desired behaviors. While the second set of respondents (prefects) based on their experience, supported negative discipline measures as it focuses on immediate compliance and lead to quick behavior change as a learner may adhere to rules to avoid punishment. Negative measures establish clear consequences for inappropriate behavior which can help the adolescents understand the limits. Prefects' views were contrary to Ballard's (2023) suggestion.

The Deterministic Effect of Adaptive Coping Strategies on Discipline Level

The findings were subjected to regression analysis in order to determine their deterministic effect on discipline level. The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3*ANOVA Table for Adaptive Strategies*

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	26.563	8	3.320	3.420	.001
Residual	280.578	298	.971		
Total	307.141	297			

In Table 3, regression sum of squares (SS Regression) of 26.563 indicate that the regression model explains 26.563 portion of the variance (adaptive stress coping strategies). It also shows a residual sum of squares (SS Residual) of 280.578 of an unexplained variance by this model. The F-Statistic from the table 4.3 shows that the model is 3.420 times more effective at predicting the dependent variable (discipline level of learners) than random error and so it can be relied upon as a determinant factor of discipline level among learners in public secondary schools if carefully implemented. The model explains further a 3.420 percent of the stress coping strategies as determining the dependent variable (discipline level of learners). Because of the given F-statistic ($F=3.420$) and the comparatively small p-value ($p=.001$), the adaptive coping strategies are statistically significant hence the model is a good fit for the data. In addition, the p-value of .001 (when $\alpha=.05$) indicates that the regression model significantly explains that these coping strategies can determine the dependent variable (discipline level). This means that the independent variables (coping strategies) collectively predict the dependent variable (discipline level) better than random chance. It can therefore be relied upon to achieving the needed discipline level in the study area and in the Kenyan public secondary schools at large.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The analyzed study findings showed that stress coping strategies positively and near moderately ($R = .294$) enhance discipline level among learners in public secondary schools. The influence is statistically significant ($p = .001$) which confirms further that the regression model

significantly explains that adaptive coping strategies determine discipline level. The research finds statistically significant positive correlations and recommends collaborative efforts among teachers, school officials, and parents to promote adaptive coping practices. The paper contributes valuable empirical data on coping strategies in the African education context and emphasizes psychological approaches over punitive disciplinary measures.

Declaration of Funding Sources

This research work was self-sponsored by the author, Janet Akoth Ochola, no funding grant was received.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Dr. Oyoo- Review, editing, methodology and conceptualization

Dr. Millan- Review, editing, methodology and conceptualization

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

I Janet Akoth Ochola declare that, no known competing personal relationships that could have contributed to influence the work reported in this article.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my profound appreciation to Dr. Eliud Oyoo and Dr. Millan Okello, both from the department of Educational Psychology and Science of Rongo University, for their contributions to the completion of my project work. Your bright words and recommendations really helped me to propel through the research journey and enabled me to complete in good time, I salute you.

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