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ABSTRACT

The intent of this research was to study the relationship between adolescent coping and self-esteem of less academically able students, and to explore how their perceived internal resources (intelligence, discipline, etc) and their access to external resources (family members/ teachers/ peers) influence how they cope with difficulties in schoolwork. The coping behaviour studied here was categorised as Problem-Focused Coping (PFC) and Emotion-Focused Coping (EFC).

The main sample was from two classes of Secondary 2 Normal (Technical) or N(T) students in one neighbourhood secondary school. Students from two classes of Secondary 2 Normal (Academic) or N(A) and two classes of Secondary 2 Express were used as comparison samples. All in, the number of students from the Secondary 2 N(T), N(A) and Express courses who took part in the study was 67, 78 and 78 respectively, giving a total of 223 students. A survey questionnaire (Appendix A) incorporating 24 items from the Adolescent Coping Behaviour Scale (Khoo, 2002) and the 25-item Self-Esteem Checklist (Lui, 1987) was used. Additionally, 14 students from the main sample were selected to be interviewed by the researcher, to further gain insights into the difficulties and constraints that N(T) students face which might hamper them from better school achievement. The researcher was guided by an Interview Guideline (Appendix B) for the individual case interviews.

The hypotheses for this study were:

(1) N(T) students use more EFC and less PFC, compared to more academically able students, when faced with academic difficulties.
(2) There is significant positive correlation between PFC and Self-Esteem.

(3) There is significant negative correlation between EFC and Self-Esteem.

(4) N(T) students are more likely to use PFC when they perceive that they have adequate internal resources to overcome the problem, or they can and are willing to access external resources (family members/teachers/peers) for help.

(5) N(T) students are more likely to use EFC when they perceive that they do not have adequate internal resources to overcome the problem, and they are unable or unwilling to access external resources for help.

The findings in this study supported hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. This is similar to Khoo’s study (2002). There were significant differences among the three courses in the use of PFC, and in the use of EFC. In particular, N(T) students used more EFC and less PFC, compared to the other two courses, when coping with difficulties in schoolwork.

The additional information gained from the interviews provided support for hypothesis 4. N(T) students who perceived themselves to have less internal resources, and had less external resources or did not access the external resources available to them, employed less PFC.

Hypothesis 5 was not supported by the findings of this study.