

Help-Seeking Behaviours of Brunei Lower Secondary School Students: Engagements with the Self, Parents, Peers and Teachers

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Abstract

The survey looked at how 171 randomly selected Brunei lower secondary school students (140 females) were engaged academically with the self, peers, parents and teachers in the context of the ongoing inclusive education and SPN21 curriculum reforms. Data were collected using the Research Assessment Package for Schools – Students in Middle schools version, RAPS-SM (Institute for Research and Reform in Education [IRRE], 1998). In general, both genders and students in the two participating schools expressed satisfaction with their engagements with the selected stakeholders and scored in the expected positive direction on most items and sections of the instrument. However, there were a few exceptions. Females and students in the girls' school scored significantly higher on the emotional security with the self-variable while participants in the mixed-gender school outperformed those in the other type of school on the teacher emotional security section of the instrument. In addition, females and students in the girls' school scored much higher than other peers on the parent autonomy support variables. Furthermore, males scored higher on the teacher involvement and teacher autonomy support items. Moreover, students in the co-education school scored higher on some items of the teacher involvement, teacher autonomy support and teacher structure variables. Overall, these findings call for appropriate educational and counselling interventions to be provided. Mixed-methods research involving a bigger number of schools was recommended to provide more insights.

Keywords: engagements; helpers; self; peers; parents; teachers; inclusive education; SPN21 curriculum

1. Introduction, Background and Setting

Due mainly to lack of research, not much was known (at the time of conducting the present study) about how young Brunei lower secondary school students seek help when confronted with academic and social problems as well as how they interact with the people who assist them. The few available studies on Brunei indicate that students who seek help perform better than those who do not (see Jaidin, 2009; Jawawi, 2009; Jawawi, 2010). Not seeking help and overdependence on help are both equally dangerous problems and a careful balance between them needs to be made. Failure to seek help often permits the problem to persist and grow beyond prevention and control levels whereas overdependence on help from other people kills an individual's personal initiatives

to solve her/his own problems and promote a dependent personality. Serious problems such as suicide ideation and committing suicide might partly be attributed to negating help. One factor contributing to lack of research is non-availability of suitable research instruments for use with young Brunei respondents. Most of the good instruments are written in standard English while Brunei's mother tongue and official language is Bahasa Melayu and tend to be too long (see Mundia & Bakar, 2010; Mundia, 2011a). Despite this problem, a small number of related researches to the present study have been conducted. Like all other students elsewhere, the limited available research indicates that Brunei lower secondary students encounter both personal problems (Mundia, 2010a; Mundia, 2010b; Haq & Mundia, 2013) and academic problems (Mundia, 2010c; Mundia, 2010d; Mundia, 2011b; Mundia, 2012a; Hamid, Shahrill, Matzin, Mahalle, & Mundia, 2013; Shahrill, Mahalle, Matzin, Hamid, & Mundia, 2013; Matzin, Shahrill, Mahalle, Hamid, & Mundia, 2013) in their school life. However, none of these studies had a strong focus on the barriers and facilitators of help-seeking initiatives in these students. Recent research shows that students do not always know how to resolve their problems (Mundia, 2010e; Shahrill & Mundia, 2014). Brunei Darussalam has also implemented three major and important educational policies largely for the sole purpose of helping students and these are: inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 1997; 1998; Mundia, 2009); the National Education System for the 21st Century known in Malay as Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad 21 and code-named as SPN21 (Ministry of Education, 2007; Mundia, 2010a); and education for the gifted / talented students (Ministry of Education, 2008). These changes were partly designed to diversify and broaden the provision of education and enhance the development of the country's human resources (Mundia, 2010e). In addition, the introduction of SPN21 was also intended to improve the quality of education in the country (Ministry of Education, 2007). However the success of these reforms will depend on many factors such as the suitability of the teachers (Mundia, 2012b; Haq & Mundia, 2012; Tait & Mundia, 2012; Tait & Mundia, 2014), availability of funds, quality of schools, changes in examinations (Mundia, 2009), and on how students are interacting with teaching and learning activities and resources in the education system. Of all these issues, the present study was interested in learning about the various ways young Brunei lower secondary school students were engaged with a few selected sources of help, namely the self, parents, peers, and teachers. We accorded more attention and priority to these stakeholders with the belief and conviction that they have potential to improve the quality of assistance given to students at an individual and group level. Teachers in particular need to interact and engage with both students and colleagues appropriately and available research shows that Brunei teachers have potential and capacity to do this (Mahalle, Matzin, Hamid, Shahrill, & Mundia, 2014). Another important consideration is that teachers must be in good mental health with no criminal offenses committed against students, colleagues and members of the public (Mundia, 2012c; Mundia, 2013). In addition we focused on lower secondary school students two reasons. First, these young learners are in a transitional stage and recently moved from primary school to junior secondary level of education. It is important to see how they are adjusting and engaged in learning at this new stage of education. For example, students are said to be emotionally engaged if they harbour positive feelings of belonging in the school (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2013) and are "enthusiastic about a class, interested in going to the class, and demonstrate a positive learning attitude" (van Uden, Ritzen, & Pieters, 2014 p.22). Second, the same young people are also undergoing a biological and developmental transition from childhood to adolescence stage. It is equally important to know how the physical and psychological changes they are experiencing are impacting their adjustment and engagement in a higher level of education. Three main student help-seeking trends have emerged from related research conducted in Brunei (Matzin *et al.*, 2013; Shahrill & Mundia, 2014; Omar *et al.*, 2014) and elsewhere (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). First, students do not normally consult mental health professionals (psychologists, counsellors, and psychiatrists) mainly for fear of stigma associated with seeing such people. Second, females are more likely to seek help at some stage than males. Third, students with personal problems usually prefer to consult family members (e.g. same-sex parent or same-sex

sibling) while those with academic problems prefer to consult mostly peers and to a lesser extent teachers who possess certain characteristics (see Omar *et al.*, 2014). Students with mathematics problems rarely consult the subject teacher due to fear of the mathematics teacher phenomenon (see Hamid *et al.*, 2013). An additional trend for some students is that they also use religion to seek divine intervention in resolving their problems (see Pabiton, 2004; 2007; Mundia, 2010d; Matzin *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, help-negation or neglect is often shaped and influenced by a variety of factors including negative experiences from previous assistance received, non-availability of suitable helpers, and negative attitudes towards potential helpers or sources of help (for details see Gould *et al.*, 2004; Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2001; Wilson, Deane, & Ciarrochi, 2005; Rickwood, 2005).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The overall goal of the present study was to identify the participants' coping styles with academic work in the lower secondary school. Specifically, the purpose of the present study was four-fold, namely to:

- Assess the participants' perceived relatedness with helpers by gender and type of school attended;
- Determine the participants' experiences of support from parents by gender and type of school attended; and
- Examine the participants' experiences of support from teachers by gender and type of school attended.

2. Method

We briefly describe below the design, sample, instruments, procedures, and data analysis techniques used in the present study.

2.1. Design

The study used the field survey approach to investigate the problem. This research design differs from the online, postal, and telephone surveys in that investigators go out in the field (relevant educational institutions in the present study) to collect the data either personally or using research assistants. The rationale and justification for employing this research strategy was two-fold. First, we wanted to involve as many students in the study as possible. Second, it was possible to give on-the-spot assistance to respondents who needed help to complete the data collection instruments correctly thereby increasing the number of usable returns.

2.2. Sample

The instrument was distributed to 211 randomly selected students at two randomly chosen government lower secondary schools in Brunei. However, the final sample was reduced to 171 by the exclusion criteria which include: non-response bias (none return of completed protocols from uncooperative participants); unusable returns (improperly completed scales); and missing values (accumulating too many unanswered items). The only inclusion criteria were that a student was Bruneian attending the selected schools and classes. Of the 171 participants, 140 (81.9%) were females while the rest (31 or 18.1%) were males. In terms of educational level, 142 (83%) of the participants were in Year 7 (known as Form 1, a transitional grade from primary school level) whereas 29 (17%) were in Year 8 (or Form 2). One of the two selected schools enrolled mixed gender students (57, 33.3%) and the other school was for girls only (114, 66.7%). However, the size of the overall sample (N) and subsamples (n) reported in different tables vary due either to pair-wise or list-wise deletion of cases with missing values depending on the type of analysis performed. Although age was not computed, all the participants were estimated to be in the early adolescence

stage (approximate age range: $\pm 12-13$). In Brunei, children commence two years of preschool at the age of five after which they begin six-year primary school education and complete it by age 12.

2.3. Instruments

Data for the study were collected using a 3-Parts instrument: (1) Part A - instructions to participants and informed consent; (2) Part B - a researcher-constructed 3-item demographic questionnaire; and (3) Part C - the Research Assessment Package for Schools – Students in Middle schools version, RAPS-SM (IRRE, 1998). The demographic questionnaire (Part B) collected biographical data on independent variables such as gender, type of school attended, and educational level. Altogether, demographical data were used as grouping variables when performing various statistical analyses described under the data analyses section below. The RAPS-SM scale (Part C) is a self-report paper-and-pencil measure of student engagement in school containing 84 items that are divided into 7 subscales assessing: ongoing engagement (5 items); reaction to challenge (6); perceived competence of the self (16); perceived autonomy (9); perceived relatedness (17); experiences of support from parents (17); and experiences of support from teachers (14). However, the first four of these scales (ongoing engagement; reaction to challenge; perceived competence of the self; and perceived autonomy) were not included in the present study. Items on all the seven subscales were scored on 4-point Likert response format (1 Not at all true, 2 Not very true, 3 Sort of true, 4 Very true). All the four RAPS-SM scales used in the present study had satisfactory and acceptable levels of test-retest reliability (average coefficient of intra-rater agreement = .75). In addition, the scales also had good content validity as judged by two educational psychologists at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Furthermore, the study was deemed (by the researchers) to have had high ecological validity since it was conducted in participants' schools and the instruments were administered in the students' classrooms by teachers of the participating children.

2.4. Procedures

Prior to collecting the data, the school administrators and participants were told about the purpose and objectives of the study and no deception was used. In addition, the participants were told both verbally and in writing about the ethical conditions for being involved in the study. With regard to English language problems, the meanings of difficult English words, sentences and phrases on the instruments were verbally explained to the participants. Furthermore, the instruments were written in simple English comprehended by Brunei students at lower secondary school level. The instrument was only administered to students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

2.5. Data Analysis

Demographical data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Items on the three RAPS-SM scales were scored on 4-point Likert scales response format (1 Not at all true, 2 Not very true, 3 Sort of true, and 4 Very true) according to instructions in the technical manual of the instrument. Negative items were reverse scored to minimize measurement errors. Only raw data were used in the present study. All the frequencies and percentages for the coping prevalence rates were based on raw scores. Raw item scores were analysed by descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-tests for independent groups). The rationale and justification for using these data analysis techniques was two-fold. First, the researchers deemed these procedures to be appropriate for addressing the research objectives. Second, the data were obtained from a random sample and there was no violation of statistical assumptions.

3. Results

The findings of the study are presented below per subscale and objectives of the study. Because each construct in the three subdomains had only few items, the analysis was performed at the item-level.

3.1. Perceived Relatedness Subdomain

Table 1. Performance on perceived relatedness subdomain

Item†	Mean (Genders) ^a	T-test (genders)	Mean (schools) ^b	T-test (schools)
Emotional security with self				
18. When I think about myself, I feel bad.	1.892 (2.615)	-3.368**	2.058 (2.691)	-3.738**
50. When I think about myself, I feel happy.	2.964 (2.846)	0.599	2.921 (2.841)	0.499
71. When I think about myself, I feel proud.	2.535 (2.707)	-0.831	2.666 (2.682)	-0.092
Satisfaction with self				
14. I wish I were someone else.	2.571 (2.569)	0.009	2.568 (2.570)	-0.007
38. I wish I felt better about myself.	3.321 (3.569)	-1.602	3.490 (3.542)	-0.407
56. I wish I liked myself better.	3.500 (3.415)	0.496	3.470 (3.411)	0.426
Parent emotional security				
8. When I'm with my parents, I feel mad.	1.285 (1.292)	-0.056	1.294 (1.289)	0.045
30. When I'm with my parents, I feel good.	3.892 (3.746)	1.559	3.823 (3.747)	0.791
47. When I'm with my parents, I feel unhappy.	1.107 (1.261)	-1.639	1.215 (1.243)	-0.283
Teacher emotional security				
3. When I'm with my teacher, I feel good.	3.500 (3.330)	1.059	3.568 (3.261)	2.386**
17. When I'm with my teacher, I feel mad.	1.321 (1.423)	-0.788	1.352 (1.429)	-0.730
37. When I'm with my teacher, I feel unhappy.	1.500 (1.430)	0.379	1.411 (1.457)	-0.397
69. When I'm with my teacher, I feel happy.	3.357 (3.407)	-0.374	3.451 (3.373)	0.699
Peer emotional security				
29. When I'm with my classmates, I feel ignored.	1.750 (1.900)	-0.747	1.882 (1.869)	0.080
44. When I'm with my classmates, I feel mad.	1.357 (1.438)	-0.589	1.470 (1.401)	0.610
62. When I'm with my classmates, I feel good.	3.678 (3.469)	1.687	3.470 (3.523)	-0.414
74. When I'm with my classmates, I feel unhappy.	1.500 (1.530)	-0.191	1.568 (1.504)	0.486

**p < .01 (two-tailed)

^aGenders: males, n = 28 (females, n = 130)

^bSchools: mixed, n = 51 (girls', n = 107)

†Item scoring: 1 Not at all true; 2 Not very true; 3 Sort of true; 4 Very true

The Relatedness subdomain of the RAPS-SM is made up of 17 items that tap five constructs: 1) emotional security with self (3 items); 2) satisfaction with self (3 items); 3) parental emotional security (3 items); 4) teacher emotional security (4 items); and 5) peer emotional security (4 items). The emotional security constructs each reflect the extent to which positive emotions are present, and negative emotions absent, when thinking about the self, or in the presence of a relationship partner (i.e. parent(s), teacher (s), or peer(s)). Satisfaction with self similarly reflects the extent to which students wish that they were different or were someone else. The participants' performance on the 17 perceived relatedness items is as presented in Table 1. As indicated in this table, we obtained only one gender-based significant difference on emotional security with the self (Item 18) where females scored much higher than their male counterparts. Counselling for girls is suggested in this finding. In terms of the two participating schools, two significant differences were obtained on emotional security with the self (Item 18) where students in the girls' school scored much higher than those in the mixed or co-education school and on teacher emotional security (Item 3) on which students in the mixed-gender school outperformed those in the girls' only school. The findings call for counselling of students in both schools.

3.2. Experiences of Interpersonal Support Domain

The experiences of interpersonal support domain of the RAPS-SM include a total of 31 items tapping two subdomains: 1) parental support; and 2) teacher support. Items within each subdomain reflect the extent to which the student feels that the adult(s): 1) are involved with them; 2) provide support for student autonomy; and 3) provide structure. Involvement items reflect the extent to which the student feels that the adult(s) know and care about them. Autonomy support items concern the extent to which students feel that they are allowed to make decisions for themselves, and the extent to which the real-life value of the work that they are asked to do is made clear by the adult(s). On the other hand, structure items reflect the clarity of the adult(s) expectations regarding student conduct, the extent to which consequences are consistent and predictable by the student when expectations are not met, and the student's perception of the fairness of the adult(s) expectations.

3.2.1. Experiences of Support from Parents Subdomain

As stated above, parental support and teacher support constitute two separate subdomains in the RAPS-SM, each encompassing involvement, autonomy support and structure. Items referring to the parent are both about school and school work (school context) or do not refer to any specific context (general context). The sample's performance on support from the parents' subdomain is displayed in Table 2. Females scored significantly higher than males on Item 75 (parent autonomy support – school context), indicating need for counselling girls and their parents. Students in the girls' school scored much higher than peers in the mixed-gender school on Item 77 (Parent autonomy support – general context), illustrating need for counselling parents.

3.2.2. Experiences of Support from Teachers Subdomain

All items referring to the teacher in the RAPS-SM are specifically about the school setting. The findings on this variable are presented in Table 3. Two gender significant differences were obtained on two items, namely Item 59 (teacher involvement) and Item 78 (teacher autonomy support). Males scored much higher on both items. These findings imply that counselling needs to be provided to both boys and teachers. The two schools differed significantly on three items, Item 1 (teacher involvement), Item 78 (teacher autonomy support), and Item 25 (teacher structure). Students in the co-education school scored much higher on all these three items than their counterparts in the same-sex school for girls only. Again counselling is implicated for both students and teachers.

Table 2. Performance on experiences of support from parents' subdomain

Item†	Mean (genders) ^a	T-test (genders)	Mean (schools) ^b	T-test (schools)
Parent involvement – school context				
4. My parents never have enough time to hear about what happens to me in school.	1.800 (2.030)	-1.006	2.166 (1.935)	1.336
58. My parents like to talk to me about school.	3.200 (2.884)	1.493	3.047 (2.879)	1.046
Parent autonomy support – school context				
10. My parents encourage me to find out how schoolwork could be useful to me.	3.100 (3.438)	-1.185	3.309 (3.425)	-0.727
20. My parents don't explain why school is important.	1.250 (1.492)	-1.378	1.309 (1.518)	-1.609
75. My parents don't talk about how schoolwork is related to what I want to be.	1.500 (1.969)	-2.343**	1.714 (1.981)	-1.748
Parent structure – school context				
7. My parents don't make it clear what they expect of me in school.	2.000 (2.200)	-0.929	2.095 (2.203)	-0.665
33. My parents know just how well I can do in school.	3.000 (3.030)	-0.163	3.166 (2.972)	1.266
70. I don't know what my parents expect of me in school.	2.450 (2.450)	-0.082	2.523 (2.444)	0.447
Parent involvement - general context				
19. My parents enjoy spending time with me.	2.450 (2.469)	1.217	3.381 (3.379)	0.011
36. My parents do a lot to help me.	3.550 (3.353)	1.418	3.333 (3.398)	-0.475
61. My parents don't seem to have enough time for me.	3.600 (3.346)	-0.519	1.928 (1.740)	1.201
76. My parents don't seem to know how I feel about things.	1.700 (1.807)	-0.504	2.238 (2.388)	-0.901
Parent autonomy support – general context				
52. My parents don't let me make any of my own decisions.	2.250 (2.361)	1.854	2.309 (2.194)	0.748
77. My parents trust me.	2.550 (2.176)	1.230	3.547 (3.277)	1.946*
Parent structure – general context				
13. My parents don't think I can do very much.	3.550 (3.323)	-0.824	1.809 (1.870)	-0.374
65. My parents are fair with me.	1.700 (1.876)	1.195	3.476 (3.379)	0.681
79. I don't know what my parents want from me.	3.600 (3.376)	-0.219	2.214 (2.120)	0.505

*p < .05 (two-tailed)

**p < .01 (two-tailed)

^aGenders: males, n = 20 (females, n = 130)

^bSchools: mixed, n = 42 (girls', n = 108)

†Item scoring: 1 Not at all true; 2 Not very true; 3 Sort of true; 4 Very true

Table 3. Performance on experiences of support from the teachers' subdomain

Item†	Mean (genders) ^a	T-test (genders)	Mean (schools) ^b	T-test (schools)
Teacher involvement				
My teacher has plenty of time for me.	3.263 (3.134)	0.615	3.375 (3.066)	2.387**
27. My teacher cares about how I do in school.	3.105 (3.349)	-0.980	3.250 (3.342)	-0.648 -0.614
40. My teacher doesn't seem to have enough time for me.	1.736 (1.976)	-1.061	1.875 (1.971)	-0.580
59. My teacher likes the other kids in my class better than me.	2.684 (2.071)	2.648**	2.325 (2.085)	1.346
81. My teacher likes to be with me.	2.157 (2.157)	-0.534	2.375 (2.190)	1.366
Teacher autonomy support				
32. My teacher does not explain why we have to learn certain things in school.	2.254 (1.578)	-0.350	1.550 (1.676)	-0.817
55. My teacher thinks what I say is important.	1.650 (2.578)	0.327	2.650 (2.476)	1.197
63. My teacher interrupts me when I have something to say.	2.515 (2.263)	1.096	2.225 (1.990)	1.426
78. My teacher tries to control everything I do.	2.023 (2.894)	2.214*	2.700 (2.295)	2.111*
Teacher structure				
9. My teacher is fair with me.	2.333 (3.315)	0.225	3.400 (3.238)	1.276
39. The rules in my classroom are clear.	3.277 (3.157)	-0.166	3.200 (3.190)	0.061
25. My teacher's expectations for me are way off base.	3.198 (2.736)	1.511	2.725 (2.342)	2.328*
53. My teacher isn't fair with me.	2.404 (1.368)	-1.122	1.450 (1.571)	-0.923
67. My teacher doesn't make clear what he/she expects of me in school.	2.000 (2.095)	-0.475	2.050 (2.095)	-0.299

*p < .05 (two-tailed)

**p < .01 (two-tailed)

^aGenders: males, n = 19 (females, n = 126)^bSchools: mixed, n = 40 (girls', n = 105)

†Item scoring: 1 Not at all true; 2 Not very true; 3 Sort of true; 4 Very true

4. Discussion

We present a brief discussion of the main findings below according to the objectives of the study. We carefully and critically examined whether each group response to an item was in the positive or

negative direction and whether the response was similar or different by gender and type of school attended.

4.1. Participants' Perceived Relatedness with Helpers by Gender and Type of School Attended

The part of the RAPS-SM instrument for assessing this research question had five parts: emotional security with the self; satisfaction with the self; parent emotional security; teacher emotional security; and peer emotional security. Participants responded in the expected and desirable positive direction on four of the five sections except on satisfaction with the self where responses on Items 38 and 56 were in the negative direction both by gender and type of school attended. The expression of self-doubt and self-deprecation exhibited in these two items are sources of worry in the present study because the self is supposed to play a substantial role in resolving problems / conflicts of both a personal and academic nature. These findings suggest that the students need help in developing a positive image of them. The self is an important construct in counselling, psychotherapy and psychiatry as it forms the basis of independent functioning. While still young in the lower adolescent stage, participants can be trained using person-centred therapy, in recognizing their potential strengths and weaknesses in solving their own problems as well as in seeking help. Such professional help may be provided by mounting sensitization workshops, motivational talks, and actual counselling interventions to individual students and groups. Resource persons for such educational and counselling interventions could be school psychologists, school counsellors, special education teachers, and senior regular school teachers employed by Ministry of Education (Special Education Unit, Counselling Unit, and Department of Schools). In addition, young learners often seek emotional support from peers and it would be better if some students were trained as peer counsellors to help mental health professionals in dealing with students' problems. The goal of these interventions should be to promote positive and active behavioural engagements with the self (see Reijntjes, Stegge, & Terwogt, 2006), emotional engagements with helpers (van Uden *et al*, 2013; 2014), and cognitive engagements with school activities (Reijntjes, *et al*, 2006).

4.2. Participants' Experiences of Support from Parents by Gender and Type of School Attended

As indicated in Table 2, the RAPS-SM scale component for measuring this research question had six sections. Participants scored in the expected positive direction on most of the items in these sections except for Items 19 and 61 (parent involvement – general context) and Item 65 (parent structure – general structure). However, we obtained only two statistically significant differences on Item 75 (where females scored much higher than male counterparts) and on Item 77 (on which participants in the mixed-gender school scored much higher than their peers in the girls only school). With regard to Item 75, parents need to talk more to girls about the relevance and importance of education to girls' intended careers. Similarly, on Item 77 parents need to work more closely with girls attending the girls' only school for both parties (girls and parents) to develop mutual trust and respect. Although no other statistically significant differences were obtained, evidence in Table 2 suggests that parents in general need to spend more time interacting with their young school-going children (see responses to Items 19, 61 and 65). As teachers' partners in educating children, the role of parents cannot be underestimated. The important educational function of parents is adequately expressed by both developmental psychologists such as Shaffer (2002) and the old Malay adage which says: "*if you want to bend a bamboo, start with the shoot*". Once adults miss a child's developmental stage, it would be difficult to influence the child in subsequent phases of life. The collaboration between teachers and parents is more essential under implementation of the ongoing inclusive education (Mundia, 2009) and SPN21 curriculum (Mundia, 2010a). In addition, both parents and teachers are supposed to serve as role models to be observed imitated by children (Bandura, 1997).

4.3. Participants' Experiences of Support from Teachers by Gender and Type of School Attended

Table 3 shows the performance of the sample on the three sections of the RAPS-SM instrument designed to measure our third research question. As can be noted from this table, both categories of the respondents (gender and type of school) scored in the positive direction on at least nine of the 14 items. We obtained five significant differences. Females (who were the majority in the sample) and students in the girls' school scored highest on Item 78 (My teacher tries to control everything I do). In addition, the participants' responses to Items 55 and 63 suggest that teachers exert too control in the classroom and the school. Altogether, Items 55, 63 and 78 imply a teacher-centric approach to teaching. Counselling of teachers is thus indicated by these findings. There is also evidence that teachers tend to be biased against boys (Item 59), a negative attitude that needs to be changed. The two items on which students in the mixed-gender school scored much higher than peers in the girls' school were Item 1 (My teacher has plenty of time for me) and Item 25 (My teacher's expectations for me are way off base). These findings call for teachers to be extra sensitive about the way they pay attention to all students in all schools as well as to have realistic expectations from students. The teachers need to interact with and engage students in meaningful ways. For teachers who are not sure how to handle certain students, they might learn the required skills or strategies through team-teaching. Recent research on Brunei trainee teachers shows teachers in Brunei may have the necessary interpersonal trust to work collaboratively for the benefit of students (Mahalle *et al.*, 2014). Under the ongoing educational reforms (inclusive education - Mundia, 2009; and SPN21 curriculum - Mundia, 2010a) it is essential that teachers have good interpersonal skills for interacting effectively with students and colleagues.

5. Conclusion

We investigated the students' experiences of self-support as well as support from parents and teachers. Most participants expressed satisfaction with themselves but the few who were unhappy with the self need counselling to develop a positive intrapersonal image. Since young students prefer to consult peers over problems rather than teachers or parents, the peer counsellors need to be trained in effective basic counselling skills. Parents and teachers were found to be vital sources of support to the participants. However, they too need training to be effective resource persons. The need for both educational and counselling interventions was indicated. Further mixed-methods research was recommended using a bigger number of schools to provide more insights on the issue.

6. Limitations of the Study

The present study was informed by three main limitations. First, as a survey the results could not establish cause-and-effect relationships in the variables investigated. Second, a qualitative interview component was not incorporated but was necessary to triangulate findings from the quantitative survey. Third, the study should have involved more schools for the results to have higher generalizability. Despite these limitations, the study yielded results that we believe will be useful in guiding and informing future research in this area of investigation.

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