

LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON DEFENSE MECHANISM STRATEGIES ON LEVELS OF ANXIETY DURING ONLINE CLASS UNDER NEW AND BETTER CLASSROOM

Pedro D. Abanador

pedro.abanador@bulsu.edu.ph

Abstract. Students during online learning experience feelings of intense fear and distress that become overwhelming which prevent them from doing everyday activities. The study aimed to determine the relationship between defense mechanism strategies and anxiety disorders of students under new normal and better classroom situations from 2019 to 2022. The anxiety disorders served as dependent variables while the defense mechanism strategies are the independent variables. The descriptive questionnaire is the instrument used to gather data with 1,260 respondents from the college of education. Simple descriptive research design was used utilizing the stratified random sampling technique in choosing respondents. The Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was used to determine the relationship between and among variables. There was a positive significant correlation coefficient between defense mechanism strategies and anxiety disorders of students under the new normal and better classroom. It is recommended that Guidance Counselors have to initiate a program of activities for students with levels of anxiety reflecting the defense mechanism strategies like group dynamics, group discussions, dance and music festivals and other group activities that will give them opportunities to overcome such psychological problems.

Keywords: Defense mechanism, anxiety disorders, strategies, panic disorder, repression, intellectualization

Background Information

Most schools in affected areas are finding solutions to continue teaching, but the quality of learning is heavily dependent on the level and quality of digital access. While virtual classes on personal tablets may be the norm, many students in less developed economies rely on lessons and assignments sent via mobile application or email.

Moreover, the less affluent and digitally savvy individual families are, the further their students are left behind. When classes transition online, these students lose out because of the cost of digital devices and data plans. Although it is too early to judge how reactions to COVID-19 will affect education systems, there are signs suggesting that it could have a lasting impact on the trajectory of learning innovation and digitization. Many households cannot afford a stable internet connection. Even those with access to the internet experience some infrastructural gaps, including the discrepancy in internet speeds in different localities. Parents and students feel anxious, or nervous, when faced with a problem at work and in school, before taking a test, or making an important decision. When worries, fears, or panic attacks start to get in the way of one's life, the

person may be suffering from an anxiety disorder. The excessive worry hinders the ability to do things efficiently and in a timely manner. The time and energy that is spent worrying would leave less time to study or do homework and negatively affect an individual in many other areas. Hypertension, coronary heart disease, alcohol dependence, nicotine addiction, depression, and suicidality are some of the complications that may be experienced by those with untreated anxiety (Boden, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2006).

It is on this premise that such study was conducted because in some circumstances the ego may rely on defense mechanisms to cope with the internal conflict or with the demands from the environment which can cause anxiety especially under new normal and better classrooms. Given the unexpected circumstances, it is crucial to explore the psycho-social experience of university students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a study is expected to measure the psychological impacts of an unforeseen emergency on students, as well as to formulate and execute effective interventions and strategies to mitigate the mental health of people at large. This study was designed to address the psychological problems experienced by university students in the College of Education.

Project Objectives

General : Identify defense mechanism strategies that relate to anxiety disorder among students under new normal and better classrooms in 2019 to 2022.

Specific :

1. Trace what defense mechanism strategies are commonly used by students in coping up anxiety disorder as to:

- 1.1 Denial;
- 1.2 Repression;
- 1.3 Projection;
- 1.4 Displacement;
- 1.5 Regression;
- 1.6 Rationalization;
- 1.7 Sublimation;
- 1.8 Reaction Formation;
- 1.9 Compartmentalization;
- 1.10 Intellectualization.

2. Determine the anxiety level of students under new normal and better classroom in terms of:

- 2.1 Generalized anxiety disorder;
- 2.2 Social anxiety disorder;
- 2.3 Panic disorder;

2.4 Phobias.

3. Analyze statistically the significant relationship between defense mechanism strategies and anxiety disorder of students under new normal and better classrooms.

Relevant Theory. The study focused on Psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud. He defined psychoanalysis as a kind of therapy for treating mental illness, anxiety as well as explaining the intricacies of human behavior by focusing on the mind's unconscious. Specifically, he posited that what a person goes through as a child plays a significant role in shaping their personality and behavior as adults. At the root of Freud's psychoanalytic theory is a specific goal: to bring the contents of a person's unconscious or subconscious mind to the level of consciousness. He believed that people often had repressed emotions they buried so deep that they did not have access to them.

Freud's psychoanalytic model separates the mind into three sections: conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The conscious mind contains current thoughts, feelings, and attention, while the preconscious mind, more commonly referred to as the subconscious, contains information that we can remember and retrieve from our memories. According to Freud, the unconscious mind exists at a deeper level. In it, we store the mechanisms that drive our behavior, including our inherent desires and instincts. In practice, he operated with the belief that the id, ego, and superego were always acting in conflict with one another because of their contrasting primary goals, hence our reliance on mental defense mechanisms. For example, Freud believed that repression was a defense mechanism of the ego to protect the conscious mind from disturbing thoughts. He also posited that projection, another defense mechanism, was the ego's solution for improper thoughts and feelings; that is, your mind would put them on another person instead of allowing you to face them. The work of a psychoanalyst is to uncover repressed memories and emotions to treat mental illness and neuroses as manifested by high levels of anxiety.

Related Studies. Instead of living in a state of such constant anxieties, the psyche employs defense mechanisms to cope with the unreasonable demands of, and tensions between, its constituent elements. From an evolutionary perspective, defense mechanisms in some circumstances might be considered an adaptive method of coping with anxieties. However, a persistent need to resort to the use of such mechanisms to cope with anxious feelings can signify an avoidance of the long-term resolution of their underlying causes. The only mechanism that Freud identified as having a primarily productive effect was sublimation, whereby a person redirects their unacceptable libidinal energy towards more acceptable goals.

At a practice in Vienna, Freud conducted the psychoanalysis of many clients and observed the use of defense mechanisms to cope with many sources of anxiety, documenting such mechanisms in a number of case studies. He would use techniques such as regression and free association to locate memories of past traumatic events that a person's psyche may have used the mechanism of repression to cope with. For instance, a client referred to as Anna recalled an old memory of witnessing a dog drink from her glass. Freud believed that her revulsion at the thought of having to drink from the glass led to the memory being repressed, but later manifested as a fear of drinking water, which led Anna to be unable to drink for days at a time. More recently, George Vaillant (1994-), a psychiatrist and at Harvard Medical School, distinguished between different

types of defense mechanisms. Vaillant believed that some defense mechanisms could be detrimental to us in coping with anxieties, whilst others could be used to serve a more productive purpose. He proposed a four-level hierarchy of defense mechanisms, ranging from the least adaptive “psychotic defenses” such as acting out, to more “mature defenses” which can help us to cope more effectively with anxiety, such as sublimation to focus our energies creatively, self deprecating humor to diffuse a tense situation or demonstrating humility when confronted (Vaillant, 1977). One of the many challenges of being a teacher is exploring and understanding the nuanced complexities of a student’s behavior especially during online class and in a better and normal classroom.

In some instances, teachers may even find themselves participating in their client’s defense mechanisms. One of their tasks is to always be aware of how complex behavior is, specifically, how client’s defense mechanisms, and behavior in response, actively or passively influence their behaviors. They’re a set of behaviors that a student has learned to rely on in times of stress that result in a higher level of anxiety. Our goal is to identify these mechanisms and to understand how the client is using them in coping with such anxiety.

IV. Mechanism of Implementation Technical and Operational Aspect

Research Design. The research study used a simple descriptive design utilizing the descriptive questionnaire as the instrument. An online-based platform was used to distribute the e-questionnaire to the students by using the Google Form.

Instrumentation. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part is the profile of respondents, the second part is the anxiety disorder and the third part is the defense mechanism strategies of respondents comprising 10 indicators with 5-point scale measurement, where 5 = Always; 4 = Very Often; 3 = Often; 2 = Seldom; 1 = Never.

Sampling Technique. The Stratified random sampling technique was used for collecting information from students. An informed consent form was attached to the questionnaire, and each participant was consented to participate in the survey after reading the consent form.

Population. There were 1,260 respondents distributed as 188 in 2019, 296 in 2020, 373 in 2021 and 403 in 2022 that were randomly selected utilizing stratified random sampling techniques prior to the result of online Anxiety Disorder Examination. The data gathering procedure was made possible by using the internet connectivity through the microsoft meet accessibility.

Statistical Treatment. The data for phase 1 and 2 were already available. Phase 3 and 4 were still gathered with the randomly selected respondents. Data were collated and analyzed using the frequency and percentage for profile of respondents, mean, standard deviation to describe the defense mechanism strategies and anxiety disorders. To measure the relationship between variables, Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was used utilizing (Statistical Package in Social Science (SPSS) software application.

Organization and Management. The researchers tried to seek help from students and professors in the College of Education especially in distributing the descriptive questionnaires to respondents through the microsoft system.

Financial Aspect. The finances were utilized following the budget schedule according to the specifications in the capsule proposal. The Gantt chart was likewise followed strictly all throughout the duration of the study. The person accountable for the liquidation of funds is the researcher in the person of Pedro D Abanador.

Discussion of Results. Defense mechanisms were first described by Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalytic theory. According to Freud, these mechanisms protect the conscious mind from contradictions between the animalistic id and the idealistic superego, ultimately contributing to "mental homeostasis. In the study the respondents involved themselves in relating to using a defense mechanism rather than paying attention to the level of anxiety experienced during online learning in 2019 to 2022. The theory of Freud seemingly helps students to cope with problems encountered until they have reached the peak of utilizing defense mechanism strategies and achieve classroom instructional objectives.

A part of the findings of the study is the consistency of denial as a defense mechanism strategy used by respondents in coping up with the four levels of anxiety such as general, social, panic disorder and phobias. Denial can involve a flat-out rejection of the existence of a fact or reality. In other cases, it might involve admitting that something is true, but minimizing its importance. Sometimes people will accept reality and the seriousness of the fact, but they will deny their own responsibility and instead blame other people or other outside forces. A common feedback of respondents in denying problems encountered during online learning that led them to develop anxiety is: *When the class starts and my internet connection is lost I am having troubles because personally I am interested in attending the class but I can't do it due to technical problems. Instead of paying attention to the problem I tried to deny the importance of attending the class instead, I look at some reading materials available at home and read until after I forget the trouble I have in my class schedule.*

An equally consistent defense mechanism is sublimation that allows to act out unacceptable impulses by converting behaviors into a more acceptable form. *I was at the height of anger when I failed to submit my assignment online because of a loss in internet connection. I felt worried since that was the deadline then surely my final grade will greatly be affected. However, I tried focusing on a solution that would help me obtain a passing grade. What I did was to call a classmate and sought assistance by sending my output to her and she uploaded it into the google classroom where our professor acknowledged my submission and I was totally relieved and coped with my anxiety.* Freud believed that sublimation was a sign of maturity and allowed people to function normally in socially acceptable ways.

In the same manner, projection as a defense mechanism registered significant relationships consistently in the survey from 2019 to 2022. Projection works by allowing the expression of the desire or impulse, but in a way that the ego cannot recognize, therefore reducing anxiety. An excerpt from the respondent; *I had a lot of regrets that I took for granted the online class with my professors because it was pandemic. I had trouble with my environment since almost all members of the family were struggling with their health. I should have a happy ending if only I project myself*

to be with my professors in asynchronous online learning considering that they were discussing lessons effectively using highly structured instructional materials.

Intellectualization works to reduce anxiety by thinking about events in a cold, clinical way. Vaillant (1992) stressed that this defense mechanism allows us to avoid thinking about the stressful, emotional aspect of the situation and instead focus only on the intellectual component. This manifested a significant correlation in coping up levels of anxiety during the online learning from 2019 to 2022. Respondents had been trying their best to do things worthwhile like reading, sharing ideas with classmates, taking good care of siblings and ill parents.

Rationalization is a defense mechanism that involves explaining an unacceptable behavior or feeling in a rational or logical manner, avoiding the true reasons for the behavior. For example, a person who is turned down for a date might rationalize the situation by saying they were not attracted to the other person anyway. A student might rationalize a poor exam score by blaming the instructor rather than admitting their own lack of preparation. The same defense mechanism strategy manifests a significant relationship to all types of levels of anxiety during online learning. According to Freud, behaviors associated with regression can vary greatly depending on the stage at which a person is fixated. For example, an individual fixated at the oral stage might begin eating or smoking excessively, or might become verbally aggressive. A fixation at the anal stage might result in excessive tidiness or messiness.

The last defense mechanism strategy that was attributed to register a significant relationship to anxiety is reaction formation that reduces anxiety by taking up the opposite feeling, impulse, or behavior. An example of reaction formation would be treating someone you strongly dislike in an excessively friendly manner in order to hide your true feelings. Why do people behave this way? According to Freud, they are using reaction formation as a defense mechanism to hide their true feelings by behaving in the exact opposite manner.

Conclusions and Recommendations. From this study, the defense mechanism strategies such as denial, repression, projection, displacement, regression, rationalization, sublimation, reaction formation, compartmentalization and intellectualization received significant relationship to general, social, panic disorder and phobias anxiety during the online and better classroom classes from 2019 to 2020. In addition, the personal profile of respondents such as course taken, major, year level, gender, family orientation and financial support likewise registered significant relationship to levels of anxiety that helped achieve the aim of reducing the anxiety level of respondents during online and better classroom. In order to provide the most effective defense mechanism strategies in coping anxiety levels, there is a need to understand them thoroughly by:

1) Having a clear presence of a comprehensive inventory of behaviors of students who experienced a lot of problems and developed levels of anxiety during online and better classroom.

2) A conscious awareness of the defense mechanism strategies as coping activities for all types of anxiety by preparing an anecdotal record of students in order that school administrators and teachers will be obliged to focus on victims of such levels of anxiety.

3) Guidance Counselors have to initiate a program of activities for students with levels of anxiety reflecting the defense mechanism strategies like group dynamics, group discussions, dance

and music festivals and other group activities that will give them opportunities to overcome such psychological problems.

4) Lastly, researchers can use the findings as a platform to study other aspects of coping levels of anxiety in some classroom activities and the school in general.

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