

A Qualitative Study of Coping Strategies in Secondary Level Mathematics Learning: A Psycho-Analytic Perspective

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Abstract

Through a qualitative research approach, this study aims to understand how thirteen secondary mathematics students who do not do well in mathematics learning cope with it in a classroom. The participants included a total of thirteen students in a Singaporean mathematics classroom at secondary school level. Observational and interview data were collected over a period of 6 weeks to understand the strategies formulated by these students to cope with mathematics learning. Grounded theory analytical methods were used in the analysis of the data. From this study, three main categories of defence mechanisms utilised by these thirteen students evolved – Avoidance, Denial and Apathy. "Avoidance", the stage where the students attempt to avoid mathematics learning, is supported by the defence mechanisms of "Aim Inhibition", "Compensation" and "Displacement". They usually begin such avoidance on an individual basis and may graduate to group actions in the form of "Collaborative Avoidance", which is supported by the defence mechanisms of "Displacement" and "Identification". Students may also use the coping mechanism of "Denial" where they imagine and maintain the picture of them doing well in future mathematics assessments. This defence mechanism is complemented by "Suppression", "Repression", "Fantasy" and "Deceit". "Apathy" the stage where they start to resist against mathematics learning openly, consists of "Minimisation", "Rationalisation", "Provocation" and "Dramatization". The findings have implications for the development of theory, practice and future research.

Keywords: *Qualitative research; coping behaviours; mathematics learning; psycho-analytic defence mechanisms.*