

## Application of Choice Theory Reality Therapy Integration Using Expressive Arts Activities in Implementing Individual Counseling Sessions

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### Abstract

This study explores the use of expressive art activities as a tool to help teachers experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression. It employs a qualitative approach with the case study method. The sample consists of four teachers from a district in the State of Selangor. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The data were then analyzed using the pattern-matching method, grouping the data into themes, subthemes, or categories with specific codes. The study's findings indicate that art activities in individual counseling sessions offer an alternative approach for counselors to provide services. Eleven themes emerged from the study: session implementation procedures, harmony in relationships, health status for survival, role adaptation, significant individual support, hope to remain enthusiastic, calmness under stress, personal values, expressive art activities that guide overall behavior, counselor skills, and integration modules that positively impact clients. The findings suggest that personal values influence clients' lifestyles in achieving their desired goals.

**Keywords:** Expressive Art, choice theory reality therapy, lifestyle, personal value

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## INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education Malaysia, through the 4th shift in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (PPPM, 2013-2025), is committed to ensuring the quality of teachers. The psychological well-being of teachers is one of the MOE's main agendas through initiative #111: PPP Professionalism Development, which began in 2020 and continues until 2025. The responsibility for providing psychological well-being services for teachers within the Ministry of Education falls under the Psychology and Counseling Division, with counselors at the Ministry of Education, State Education Department, and District Education Office playing key roles. Based on their functions and responsibilities, counselors are required to provide services focused on promoting human well-being by developing individual potential to meet the country's aspirations (Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bilangan 1 Tahun 1999), particularly in facilitating psychological change among teachers. Counselors are responsible for providing counseling and

psychological services to ensure the well-being of individuals, organizations, and communities. To support the well-being of educators, the Ministry of Education continually works to improve the competence of counselors to an optimal level and ensures the provision of appropriate interventions to preserve the psychological well-being of educators in Malaysia (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia [KPM], 2021).

Counselors or therapists may use specific treatment methods that contribute to the outcome of therapy during the therapeutic relationship process (Duncan, Miller, Wampold & Hubble, 2010; Norcross, 2011; Norcross & Guy, 2007). The best way to facilitate change in a client is to build a healthy, positive relationship, ensuring that the client feels safe and accepted (Mason & Duba, 2009). To achieve change, Wubbolding (2017) developed a skill-building strategy for mental health professionals to help clients better assess themselves, accept the change process, and make more effective life choices. These interventions help clients deal with post-traumatic stress, anger issues, grief and loss, self-harm, antisocial behavior, career concerns, and relationship problems (Wubbolding, 2017). The techniques introduced by Wubbolding (2017) are applicable to mental health treatment with cross-cultural relevance to clients of all ages. Additionally, clients seeking services need to focus on themselves while counselors develop new interventions and improve communication through the use of appropriate strategies.

Stress, anxiety, and depression are common negative emotions among adults (Byrne & Pachana, 2019). An increasing number of teachers are experiencing mental health issues due to their responsibilities and workloads (Zamri, Moy & Hoe, 2017). Mental health problems among teachers can lead to a decrease in quality of life and increased healthcare costs (Kumar, Adiga & George, 2014), as well as suicidal ideation (Sareen, 2005; Druss & Pincus, 2000), feelings of helplessness, decreased job satisfaction, burnout, discomfort, relationship problems with students, and increased physical health issues (American Federation of Teachers [AFT] & Badass Teachers Association [BAT], 2017; Brunsting et al., 2014; Chang, 2013; Devos, Dupriez, & Paquay, 2012; Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf & Spencer, 2011), as well as mental disorders, including suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety (Titheradge, 2019; Melchior, 2007).

Therefore, successful therapy guides clients to achieve satisfying relationships and teaches them effective ways to take action (Robey, Beebe, Mercherson & Grant, 2011). Each counselor has expertise in conducting counseling sessions, and various methods and theories are used when providing services to clients. CTRT is one such method that can be applied during the helping process and has been proven successful in achieving change in clients (Davis, 2011; Noryati Ismail & Ahmad Jazimin, 2016; Lojk, Butorac, Posavec, Maras, Kranželić & Baković, 2018). In addition to CTRT, expressive arts (EA) activities serve as tools that can be used to implement helping services. These activities can stimulate clients to communicate clearly and focus on relevant information. This study aims to explore the integration of expressive arts activities with CTRT to help teachers address stress, anxiety, and depression.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method used was qualitative, conducted through interviews and document analysis. The researcher followed an interview protocol developed by the study's objectives. Four clients agreed to participate in the interview sessions. The interview data were analyzed using Atlas.ti 24 software, allowing the researcher to develop themes based on the categories identified in the study findings, employing the pattern-matching method (Yin, 2018; Musta'in & Handrianto, 2020). The analysis of the study findings used the pattern-matching method to group all findings into themes, subthemes, and categories based on codes determined by the researcher. This study focuses on exploring the application of CTRT integration using expressive art to help clients facing stress, anxiety, and depression.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis results of the study, the researcher identified eleven themes. These themes include session implementation procedures, relationship harmony, health status for survival, role adaptation, significant individual support, maintaining enthusiasm, achieving calmness under stress, personal values, expressive art activities shaping overall behavior, counselor skills, and integration modules, all of which have a positive impact on the clients.

### **Theme 1: Session Implementation Procedures.**

The procedures for implementing the session include the stages before, during, and after the counseling session. According to the findings, the researcher followed the established procedures when conducting the counseling session with the client.

#### **Before the Session**

Obtaining the client's consent to proceed with the activities is a crucial step that demonstrates the counselor's concern for the client before starting the session.

*KS: "Later, after the break, we will continue with the next session, is that okay?"*

*SK-2: "Okay, I need to go back to the office first, is that alright?"*

#### **During the Session**

After the client agrees to proceed with the counseling session, the counselor needs to carry out the structuring during the session. The analysis of the findings shows that confidentiality is a key element emphasized by the counselor during the session to ensure the client feels comfortable sharing during the session.

*KS: "What I mean is the same. From an ethical standpoint, anything you tell me is confidential, except for a few things that involve safety aspects. But, teacher, I also want to remind you that what we're discussing here is*

*also related to the needs of a researcher, so when I say confidential, I mean that your name will remain confidential."*

**SK-1:** "Okay."

**KS:** "Thank you..."

### **After the Session**

Based on the analysis of the findings, the researcher found that the session termination occurs after the counselor hands over the responsibility to the client and obtains the client's consent to end the session.

**KS:** "Okay, so I would like to thank you, teacher, for your good cooperation in carrying out the CTRT-ES module for this individual session. On behalf of the Ph.D. student who created this module, I also want to thank you for your commitment and cooperation in implementing this module."

**SK-2:** "Alright, thank you."

**KS:** "Okay, thank you, teacher. Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh."

### **Theme 2: Harmony in Personal and Professional Relationships**

The findings indicate that clients need harmony in both their personal and professional relationships. Some of the subthemes related to harmony in these relationships are as follows:

#### **Harmonious relationships provide peace of mind.**

The findings show that a harmonious family relationship helps the client feel more at ease with the situations they are facing. The results indicate that a harmonious family relationship has a positive impact on the client.

**SK-2:** "We want to mention family love."

**KS:** "It's easy for you to write here. Write here what you haven't received from the love of the family. You want family love. Thank you for that family love. You have received that family love."

**SK-2:** "Write 'receive.'"

**KS:** "No, it's not 'receive.' Write 'family love.' It's the same."

**SK-2:** "Okay, I'll write it down first. 'Received family love.' Okay, that's fine."

### **Theme 3: Physical Health Status Affects Survival**

Good physical health helps clients sustain their survival by enabling them to meet basic life needs. The researcher found that clients require good physical health to ensure that survival aspects can be effectively fulfilled.

**KS:** "...What about survival?"

**SK-1:** "Recently, my cat was sick, and I needed money for treatment. I accidentally hit my own cat, and then I needed about 400 or so, but I didn't have enough money to go anywhere. That's the situation."

#### **Theme 4: The Role of Adaptation and Responsibility**

The power to carry out the various roles one holds. Based on the findings, the study indicates that clients need the power to undertake the roles assigned to them. Through the application of the CTRT-ES integration module, clients clearly understand the basic needs involved, including the power required to perform the responsibilities and tasks entrusted to them.

*SK-2: "...The eighth one, social. This one is about power. As the head of the family, maybe."*

*SK-3: "Okay, for power, I chose this image because I feel that the people at the top seem to enjoy hurting those below them. There are too many people acting like the leader. So, the person doing the work below is only one. When it comes to the leader, the image I picked has 4-6 people above, but maybe in my situation, there aren't really 6 people above me, just a few. So, I placed the emoji of someone who seems resigned. But even though my face looks like I've given up, the situation still disturbs my psychology. I feel stressed here, even though my face shows resignation. I chose this emoji because it represents me, accepting things reluctantly... Forced to accept, resigned in a sense of helplessness."*

#### **Theme 5: Support from Significant Individuals.**

The findings indicate that clients require love and support, especially from significant individuals in their lives. Based on the module applied, the counselor provided guidance and awareness to the client, helping them realize that they need love from their family as a source of support to continue their tasks and responsibilities.

*SK-1: "But I feel deeply moved because there are a few teachers who care and helped me. Because of that, I felt motivated to complete the task. I was so touched that I prayed for that friend. I couldn't express what I felt, but I prayed to Allah to bless them with a child, as they don't have children. I prayed for them, hoping they would have children because I was really touched. There was a task I had finished, but the deadline was approaching quickly, and they helped me. They wanted to assist me. I prayed for them in my prostration. Allah, thank you. When it comes to spending RM1, I'll buy them food if I can. But I am so moved by their help. There are a few friends who helped me."*

*KS: "Alhamdulillah, praise be to Allah."*

#### **Theme 6: Hope to Stay Motivated.**

Furthermore, the analysis of the findings shows that hope is one of the factors that provide motivation for clients to continue fulfilling their responsibilities. The findings indicate that the hope fostered helps clients remain motivated in facing the challenges of life.

*SK-2: "Improving relationships. Just relationships. My child's ambition to continue studying while learning. More than just love. I want to write: I*

*am grateful that my child is studying while learning. Or should I say it like this? The ambition for my child to study while learning has been achieved.*

### **Theme 7: Calmness in Facing Stress**

Based on the findings of the study, it show that clients need space for themselves and to engage in activities that bring them calmness. When clients face stress, they need calmness to ensure their emotions remain positive as they face the challenges ahead.

*SK-1: "Because last week, I seemed happy—not exactly happy, but calm. It was like everything was okay, and I could talk. But today, I'm stressed. I need to go to a place where I can feel calm, like a place I can just look around. I know that when I look at the beach or other peaceful places, it influences me, and I'll feel happy again. It's like I'll regain my motivation."*

### **Theme 8: Personal Values Held by the Client**

The findings show that the personal values held by the client also help encourage the client to behave positively. The values they hold also help the client to remain calm and think positively about the situations they face. Through these positive values, the client has developed a positive mindset toward the situations and accepts the responsibilities given.

*SK-2: "Sometimes we are separated from our children because they want to study. They excel, and there are situations where we are apart, but then we meet again, and we feel happy. It's like being happy and sometimes sad—sometimes, sadness comes at the end, but sometimes happiness comes too. It's not always sad."*

### **Theme 9: Expressive Arts Activity Guiding Overall Client Behavior**

Based on the findings of the study, shows that through the arts activities conducted, the counselor was able to guide the client in performing expressive arts activities based on the CTRT approach.

*KS: "It's okay, ask. Alright, if the teacher doesn't mind... Okay, this is the first drawing. Alright, what did the teacher draw? This one... What? The teacher wrote your name. You mentioned you like to write your name, right? Then you drew a flower. Can you explain to me what all of this means? Including the writing below: 'I love myself, help me.' Alright, can you share a little about this with me?"*

### **Theme 10: Counselor Skills**

The findings from the application of the CTRT-ES integration module also show that the counselor used counseling skills during the individual counseling session with the client. One of the skills applied by the counselor was relationship-building, which was used to establish rapport between the counselor and the client, ensuring that the client felt comfortable sharing with the counselor.

*KS: "Okay, Assalamualaikum, teacher. How are you today?"*

*SK-1: "I'm fine."*

*KS: "Good, I see you're cheerful today."*

*SK-1: "Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah, Amen."*

*KS: "Have you had breakfast today?"*

### **Theme 11: The Positive Impact of the CTRT-EA Integration Module**

The findings indicate that the client showed enthusiasm during the counseling sessions with the counselor. Based on the results obtained, the researcher found that the counselor successfully guided the client in performing activities within the CTRT-ES module.

*KS: "So, today, we have scheduled a follow-up to discuss the next steps. How do you feel about it? Last week's issues are behind us; what are your thoughts now as we move forward?"*

*SK-1: "Oh, I've been looking forward to it."*

*KS: "Looking forward to it, okay."*

*SK-1: "What's the next step? I can't imagine what Dr. has planned for today."*

Based on the findings from the study, show that the client is guided, and the counselor can conduct individual counseling sessions more clearly using the information displayed through the expressive arts activities during the session. The CTRT approach helps provide the client with a clearer understanding of themselves and the issues at hand, while expressive arts make it easier for the client to express their thoughts and feelings.

The teaching profession has been proven to be a job that is typically faced with high work-related stress (Leung et al., 2009; Naghieh et al., 2015; Handrianto et al., 2021). This study successfully developed the CTRT-EA integration module, which can serve as an alternative for counselors across Malaysia in assisting teachers who are experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression. The development of this module is based on the findings regarding the need for counselors to address teachers facing stress, anxiety, and depression, with an emphasis on selecting activities related to cross-cultural and societal issues in Malaysia.

In the context of mental health, personal and family factors contribute to stress and weaken teachers, which can lead to teachers taking temporary leave (Pressley, 2021; Rita et al., 2021; Arwin et al., 2022). The teaching profession plays a key role in developing human capital for the sustainability of future generations. The psychological well-being of teachers is crucial to prevent them from facing stress, anxiety, and depression, which can hinder their ability to contribute to developing the nation's human capital (Handrianto et al., 2019; Carroll et al., 2022). Mental health refers to a positive state of well-being or the ability to enjoy life and cope with the challenges we face (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021).

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the findings of this study show that the development of the CTRT-ES module helps counselors conduct individual sessions with clients

experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression. The study reveals that personal values influence all decisions and actions of clients facing stress, anxiety, and depression. Therefore, counselors need to help clients identify actions that do not violate their values to help clients achieve the desired quality of life. However, the findings of this case study cannot be generalized to all teachers. Nonetheless, the researcher suggests that future studies could explore the impact of the developed module on clients experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression within a larger group.

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